

Waltzes and Waterfalls

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Waltzes and Waterfalls

by [L4UNDRYBEAR](#)

Summary

When George receives a message from Dream's mum asking him to fly over and surprise Dream for his birthday, he doesn't think much of it. Not that it is normal for his adult friend's mothers to ask him over for a glorified playdate, but because he assumes that, after his guest appearance at the party, he can spend the week lazing around with Dream and Sapnap.

That is, until he somehow winds up on a family holiday in Virginia playing the part of Dream's long-distance boyfriend.

Notes

hello!

this was written for the 2021 dnf reverse big bang, and is partially inspired by the wonderful Laura's ([@midnighbikeride](#)) artwork, which can be seen here (if you're reading this she hasn't posted it yet because time zones but it will be linked here as soon as it is

up!).

new chapters will be posted every thursday

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George loved to travel. Or rather, he usually did.

As a child, he would lose sleep in anticipation of flights, packing and repacking his rucksack with whatever he felt was necessary, dreaming up endless scenarios of the holiday to come; as an adult, he found himself losing sleep once again, although this time for an entirely different reason.

Music *far* louder than what would be healthy somewhat muffled the cacophony of chaos surrounding him to the extent that, with his vision obscured by the itchy eye mask he had grabbed at the duty-free, he could almost pretend that he was somewhere else. *Almost*. But the low and steady rumble of the aeroplane's engine was inescapable, and the cries of the baby in row five somehow drowned out the rap he was blasting, and with the misfortune of being cramped between two older ladies who had no concept of personal space and were talking to each other as though he wasn't sat right in the middle of them, nattering on about quilting and bridge and their grandchildren's misfortunes at a level which was very much not inside voices— maybe the promise of sleep was too good to be true.

And that wasn't even considering the pit of trepidation that had settled deep in his gut — a persistent reminder, the edge of adrenaline constant through his veins and arteries making the beating of his heart just that bit faster. So instead of even attempting to sleep, he settled on reminiscing about how he got there in the first place.

It was a bizarre situation. It really was. He probably would have found it humorous if it wasn't happening to him, but being the brunt of a joke never makes it quite as funny.

It had started at some point in March. Or maybe it was April? He couldn't remember. It didn't really matter. He was in a call with Dream and Sapnap but none of them were speaking, just enjoying the presence of the others whilst they worked away, a playlist on loop in the background. It was his phone vibrating that drew him out of his focus and he glanced down expecting to see one of his parents or his sister—they were the only people who sent him text messages after all— but was faced with a different contact entirely.

He read the message that was so rudely obscuring the adorable photo of his cat on his home screen twice over to check that there wasn't a mistake before unlocking his phone to read the message in full.

'Hello George,' it read, followed by a smiling emoji, 'I hope this is still your number! I was wondering if you were around in August to come and see Dream!'

And the number that the messages came from was saved in his phone under the contact "Dream's Mum".

"Dream?!" George exclaimed incredulously, swallowing down the laughter threatening to bubble up, "Why is—" but he cut himself off at the sight of the next message; *'don't mention anything, it's going to be a surprise for his birthday!!!'*

"'Why is' what?" Dream shot back, confused.

"Oh- uhh, nothing I think I just misread something." George choked. He cursed himself for not making a 'your mum' joke because the irony would have been just beautiful but it was clear that he had neither the coolness of head nor the speed of wit to pull that off successfully without spilling anything.

"What did you misread, George? Go on?" Sapnap taunted him, giggling at the spluttering mess that George had become. In the reflection of his computer screen he watched the colour rush to his face—his cheeks getting rosier by the second, tips of his ears practically glowing with all the heat they were emitting.

"Oh no it's fine- I- err- ignore me. Actually, I think it's time for some lunch, I'll be back soon," he spoke fast, ending the call before realising that he never actually responded to Dream's mother.

'I think I should be free around then.' he typed back quickly with fingers shaking from the rush of adrenaline coursing through his body, triggered by both the shock and embarrassment. He received an onslaught of thumbs up and smiles, along with a firm insistence to pay for the ticket and requests for various pieces of information.

Surprisingly, George didn't think about it much after it happened. Not that it wasn't unusual for his adult internet friend's mother to text him about visiting as if they were little children going on a playdate, but more that George was partial to dealing with issues by not dealing with them at all. So he went about his life with those lone messages tucked neatly into a desolate corner of his mind. That was, until the beginning of August.

'Hi George! I hope you've been well, just thought I'd send over the plane tickets.'

Right. The trip to see Dream. That he'd totally forgotten about. After thanking God that he didn't have anything planned aside from streams over the next few weeks, he clicked on the link only to be faced with something he wasn't quite expecting.

'Are you sure you've got the right airport? I thought I was flying into Orlando or Miami!' he typed quickly, double-checking that it did indeed say London Heathrow to Charlottesville, Virginia.

'Oh no, did you not know? We're going up to stay at Clay's Grandparent's house! Don't worry, his siblings also bring their partners or a friend occasionally! I assumed he had talked about it to you, he keeps on saying how much he can't wait to go back'

And that was enough to throw him into a full-blown panic. A panic that Sapnap unfortunately had to bear the brunt of.

After falling into hysterics over the fact that Dream's mother had George's phone number from that one time he messaged her pretending to be Dream's boyfriend, Sapnap had told him that Dream was indeed going to Virginia with his family. And that he *had* mentioned it on call, George was just not paying attention—which wasn't particularly out of character for him, as much as he wished he could deny it.

He knew that Dream visited his family for a couple of weeks each summer—he would always be far less available during that time, the wifi undoubtedly worse and the buzz of people present in the background of his calls, but George hadn't considered that it was where *he* was going. Meeting Dream was one thing, but his entire family was *another* and his anxiety levels were only hiked up 1 when Sapnap confirmed that he wasn't going with them, but after an hour of reassurances, George had been brought down from the verge of an anxiety attack sufficiently to sort out everything for the trip.

Despite how he had panicked, there was no way that any amount of worry in the world could overshadow both the excitement and nervousness that he felt about *finally* being able to meet Dream in person. It was a topic they had skirted around for a while for multiple reasons; George was terrified that meeting Dream in real life would change their dynamic and affect their friendship. Dream had told him that he was afraid of being underwhelming, and that George just wouldn't like the real-life version of him, despite George's many reassurances that that would definitely not be the case.

For George, meeting Dream was not the same as meeting just anyone. He knew he was being

ridiculous but there was something about him, about their friendship, that was *different*, and it made the meeting all the more exciting—all the more frightening. His feelings for Dream were certainly more complex than those for his other friends but he was afraid to delve into them, scared of what he could find. Meeting him was probably going to be awkward—of course it was going to be awkward at *first* but they would be fine, wouldn't they? Surely after a few hours it would—

His train of thought was derailed by some rather aggressive tapping on his thigh. With a sigh, he slid the eye mask up to rest on his forehead, wincing at the onslaught of artificial light illuminating the plane, and removed his headphones, which were now blasting a song that had played at least three times by now.

“The ladies are just about to come over with some breakfast, dear.” The woman sat on his right drawled, tucking a stubborn piece of wiry white hair behind a gaudy rhinestone barrette. George flashed her the best smile he could manage, stretching as much as was possible in the confines of his economy chair, before pulling down the tray. His mind screamed for the rest that was stolen from him, eyes protesting against the sudden stimulation, but he rubbed the blariness away with clumsy fingers, letting out a weary sigh before finally tackling the accumulation of his stuff that he had somehow strewn across his allocated metre squared.

The breakfast was not the best—but then again, when is aeroplane food anything to be desired? So he chewed mechanically on the rubbery eggs and the mushy baked beans and gulped down a cup of coffee that was not nearly big enough, listening in on a particularly *fascinating* debate as to whether the creaming method or the all-in-one method was better for Victoria Sponges—

(“Creaming the butter and sugar together makes the cake airier, Geraldine!”)

“Well, Betty. Mary Berry thinks that it's unnecessary, and you can't tell me that you'd ever question *Mary!*”)

On the plus side, George chuckled to himself as they disembarked the plane, *at least I'll do well if they ever make me go on Celebrity Bake Off.*

They had arrived at O'Hare International Airport, Illinois in good time. Unfortunately, a stopover was required, seeing as the closest International airport to where they were staying in the-middle-of-fucking-nowhere, Virginia, was hours away, but at least there was only an hour until the next plane departed. And by the time he had been whisked off of the plane, trekked over to the gate which was conveniently on the other side of the terminal and embarking on the new plane, the layover had practically passed already.

The second flight was only a couple of hours long, and George praised whatever higher being there was when he was in the window seat this time (he wasn't sure if he could take being in a Granny sandwich for a second longer). The minutes were wasted away watching the sprawling cities, rolling fields and great mountains below him that was America accompanied by a different playlist than before—one that Dream had made him. It was a little different to his usual choices; more mellow, more acoustic, but George liked it all the same, and whether that was down to the music or the person who made it was up in the air.

He felt like a zombie walking through Charlottesville Albemarle Airport, he wondered if he'd left his brain in the UK somehow as he let the swathes of people take him where he needed to be. As he waited for his luggage he quickly called Sapnap, longing for the familiarity in such an alien place.

"H'lo?" Sapnap slurred so softly George could barely hear it over the excited chatter of holidaymakers from his end and the rustling of bedsheets through the phone. "You landed yet?"

"No, I'm calling you from 40,000 feet in the sky." George shot back sarcastically, the role of his eyes clear in the tone of his voice.

"*Shut up*, you literally just woke me!" Sapnap groaned, yawning obnoxiously.

"Like you don't wake me up because you're bored literally every day."

"Okay but that's different."

"Why's it different?!"

Sapnap sighed dramatically, "Because you're five hours ahead of me!"

"And? I need my sleep." George laughed, tapping his foot to the rhythm to a song he couldn't remember the name of as he mentally willed the bags to hurry.

"Whatever... wait" He cooed at a little mew in the background, "Patches has come to say hello—Patches! Say hello to George!" There was a pause, and the sound of shuffling across the line but no further thoughts from Patches. "Stupid cat." Sapnap grumbled, "Always sucks up to Dream then bullies me behind his back."

George snickered, “I see where she’s coming from, to be honest.”

“Hey! You’re meant to be on my side!” Sapnap audibly pouted, “Whatever. How are you liking America?”

“I mean, from what I’ve seen of the inside of the airports, it’s fine?” George chuckled lightly before he trailed off in favour of a more earnest tone “I don’t know, Sap. I’m pretty nervous.”

“George, we’ve been over this, like, ten times. They’re gonna love you. Dream already loves you and his family are *always* asking how you’re doing.”

“Yeah, but what if they *don’t* like me-” He lamented dramatically, before gasping as the conveyor belt stuttered to a start, the first suitcase appearing through the rubber flaps. “Wait, shit, the bags are coming, I’ve gotta go but I’ll call you later, okay?” George spoke hurriedly before hanging up and shoving his phone in the pocket of his sweatpants.

When he managed to locate his suitcase, lugging it off the conveyor belt with a little more of a struggle than he would have perhaps liked, he opened his text messages. First to send Dream’s mother a quick message confirming his arrival, to which she reassured him that she was waiting in a coffee shop nearby, and then a happy birthday message to Dream, because even if he was going to see him in person very soon he couldn’t stand the thought of Dream thinking that he had forgotten, especially a milestone like his 21st.

Dream’s mother looked exactly like he would have expected; quite tall, almost the same height as George, with long, white-flecked blonde hair and a familiar smile, just like Dream’s only softened with crow’s feet. She held a sign with George’s name scrawled on in block capitals, giving him an enthusiastic wave from across the room the moment she caught sight of him. George grinned back at her, feeling that rush of adrenaline spread through his body, hands trembling, head dizzy, and hurried over to be drawn into a hug that he was very much not expecting, although he tried to reciprocate nonetheless.

“George, honey! It’s so lovely to meet you!” She smiled widely, “I’m Clay’s mom, Sarah.”

“It’s lovely to meet you too,” George replied with as much enthusiasm as can be mustered having not slept for over a day. His hands twitched uselessly at his side, cracking each knuckle with his thumbs and then repeating the motion in an attempt to desperately dispel the anxiety. He wanted this to go well so badly, he wanted Dream’s mother to like him so badly, and with his brain

running on lost hours of sleep and each nerve set alight with apprehension he tried his very best to keep a constant smile and an ear in the conversation.

“I’m sorry that he couldn’t have picked you up himself but that would have ruined the surprise, wouldn’t it!” She chuckled as she reached for his suitcase, but George took it before she had the chance to, dragging it to his side.

“I’ve got it, don’t worry! Thank you, though.”

“Oh aren’t you *so* polite! No wonder Clay loves you so much!” She laughed cheerily. “Come on then, we should get driving otherwise we won’t be back before him!”

At first, the car ride was passed with small talk—the standard topics you go through with a stranger. Sarah, George had found, was a very sweet woman; kind and jolly, and she clearly cared deeply for her children, and George was relieved to find that this quickly calmed his nerves. She was the sort of person that you could instantly trust, the person that would feel like you’d known them forever after only half an hour or so. However, it quickly became evident that George was *tired*, and so she turned off the radio and stopped talking, insisting that he get some rest instead.

Admittedly, George really did need it.

What roused him an hour later was the barking of a dog. He thought he was dreaming at first, but when he blinked away the gunk in his eyes and peered out of the window, there was indeed a dog standing outside the (now motionless) car. It was massive—stocky and broad, covered in thick, velvety-looking fur with dark, expressive eyes and a lolling tongue.

“We’re here!” Sarah announced brightly, “I hope you rested well! Don’t mind Flick, she might be massive but she’s a huge softie, probably the gentlest dog I’ve ever met.”

“Sorry for sleeping through the journey.” George apologised sheepishly, stifling a yawn as he clambered out of the car, gingerly petting the dog—Flick—on the soft, black fur of her head a few times, grinning as her tail beat wildly in response, before stumbling around to the boot of the car.

“Don’t worry about it honey! I bet you were so tired after travelling for—what was it—ten hours?”

“Well, I left my house at ten yesterday so...” George paused, counting the hours in his head, “about sixteen?”

“*Sixteen* ?! Gosh, you must have really needed that rest then!” She laughed, guiding George to the front door, who was now tugging his suitcase along the gravel driveway and cringing as it got stuck on a rock every other step, Flick the dog following closely in suit. “Well, this is my parent’s house!” Sarah smiled, gesturing to the building, “The rest of them have all gone into town to get some breakfast and will be back in...” she checked her watch, “about thirty minutes or so, so I’ll show you up to Clay’s room and you can get all settled in, alright?”

“Thank you. And thank you so much for everything Sarah, for inviting me over, and paying for my plane ticket, and organising this and everything else.” George spoke, filled with genuinity.

“Oh it’s nothing, really! I just know that you being here will make Clay’s birthday—no—it will make his *entire trip*, so if anything I should be thanking you!” She chuckled, leading him up a splintering wooden staircase that creaked with each step. George couldn’t help but smile at the framed photos that littered the walls, totally mismatched in the most cohesive way. Each contained its own memory, one that George felt fondly of despite it not being his own. “You’ll be in the first room on the right, do you need anything? Food? A drink?”

“I’m good, thanks.” George smiled. Despite the crippling panic he had initially felt about coming to stay with Dream and his family, Sarah had successfully managed to ease at about half of the things he was worried about? Maybe sixty percent if you were pushing it. All he could do was hope that the rest of the family were similarly delightful.

But then it hit him that *he was meeting Dream*. He was meeting Dream in about twenty minutes and he had just been travelling all night and probably had bags under his eyes that rivalled raccoon’s and he didn’t need to check to know he smelt unsavoury. “Actually, I might have a quick shower if that’s alright.”

“Of course! Clay has an en-suite, feel free to use that.”

And after muttering a final quick “thanks,” he entered into Dream’s room, gently clicking the door shut behind himself. The first thing he noticed was the beds. Of which, there was only one. Granted, it was a rather large double bed, a king, he’d reckon, but that didn’t change the fact that they were really expecting him and Dream—two *grown men* —to share a bed. George weakly attempted to reassure himself that there must have been a mix up, or perhaps a blow-up mattress to be inflated, maybe a spare bed that was yet to be set up. There were plenty of scenarios that did not involve the two of them sleeping directly next to each other that would almost certainly come into play... right? George wrote his fears off as useless, brought on by his sleep-deprived mind, swiftly moving on to being preoccupied with the second thing he noticed. Which was that he was in

Dream's room. *Dream's room*. It was clearly well-lived in, photos haphazardly taped to the walls, a pile of laundry on the chair set by his desk, the bed unmade—George felt nothing short of *intrusive* standing somewhere so incredibly personal but he couldn't help but to look around.

He knew it wasn't perhaps the right thing to do but curiosity had gotten the better of him. It was funny how somewhere could feel familiar and yet so foreign; he found himself recognising landscapes of places Dream had travelled to that had been sent to him in photos, piles of books with titles he had been recommended, titles he had recommended Dream *himself*, even the view from the window was unfailingly the background of half the Snapchat Dream would send George whenever he was here. It brought him a visceral feeling that he could only describe as similar to *deja vu*—everything little thing that he had recognised was swaddled in unknown; friends whose faces George didn't know, trinkets from franchises that he was unaware that Dream was even interested in, art of places George was unfamiliar with, and, of course, photos of Dream.

It wasn't that George didn't know what Dream looked like, quite the contrary actually; they had video called dozens of time and Snapchatted each other regularly but those were always blurred, cropped, showing half his face, just his hair, a middle finger, so seeing photos of Dream whole, uninterrupted, without permission just felt *wrong*. He felt like he was breaking Dream's trust, crossing an unwritten boundary, and he thought about it as he showered, scrubbing the invisible layer of guilt and airport grime that dirtied his skin down the drain, filling his head with peppermint and tea tree and steam from the water which was probably far too hot but the scalding of his skin was grounding.

After dressing in some clean sweats and an incredibly soft grey hoodie and towel-drying his hair, he settled down on the armchair in the corner of the room. It was dark green, smothered in a soft navy throw and was comfy enough that he was tempted to just rest his eyes, perhaps tempt some semblance of sleep, but a quick look at his phone confirmed that it would be all but futile seeing as Dream would be arriving in just minutes. And so he took to responding to his messages. Sappnap, true to his character, had bombarded him with questions since their call; what the house was like, how he liked Dream's mother, whether he'd met Dream yet, and with an amused smile George tried his best to answer them all, receiving an excited key spam in return. Wilbur had sent him a video idea, one that he agreed to film in a couple of weeks or so and Dream—well—Dream had asked when he was around to call, and George just responded '*very soon*', unable to suppress a deviant chuckle at what was to come when Dream responded, innocently letting him know that he would be available in a few minutes.

He took that as his cue to return downstairs, taking the steps by two with trembling legs and only almost tripping once.

"Sienna's just texted me, she says they're gonna arrive any minute now," Sarah called from where she was standing at the end of the hallway. George couldn't help but to internally scoff, of *course* Sienna was in on it. She was the only one of Dream's siblings that he had actually spoken to, and, being the youngest sibling, she had an aptitude for stirring up chaos. She and Sappnap would often team up on Dream whilst George sat on the other end of the phone, telling them what to do. And

she was a good kid too—George didn't miss how she would check on Dream when she came over, make sure he wasn't overworking himself, stressing too badly or beating himself up over something inconsequential, and then it all *clicked*.

“This was all her idea, wasn't it.” George chuckled, and Sarah nodded in response.

“Of course we all agreed to it pretty quickly seeing as it was a fantastic idea, especially with you and Clay, you know... being-”

George did not know.

Since they were friends? But Dream had a bunch of other online friends. Since they hadn't met up in real life before? Since they'd known each other for so long? But he'd known Bad for even longer and hadn't met up with him either, let alone been invited to a family holiday, but before Sarah could finish the sentence the sound of footsteps on gravel and jovial chatter came increasingly closer until the front door was flung open and—

“*George?!*”

Chapter End Notes

well, how was that for a start!

if you liked it so far, be sure to leave a comment, kudos, subscribe etc you know the drill, and maybe come and say hi to me on twitter [@L4UNDRYBEAR](#)

shoutout to kat [@mushbloom](#) for betaing and lee [@putthycat](#) for putting up with my incessant questioning! also thanks to fern [@fernsandroses](#) for suggesting that i set it in Virginia

see you next Thursday!

arti :D

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

George meets Dream, finds out why Dream's mum was acting a little off and has to come to terms with the new and added responsibility suddenly thrust upon him.

Chapter Notes

I think this is the longest individual chapter I've ever written!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“ *George?!*”

Dream was there.

Dream was there, in front of him, in real life.

“Happy birthday?” He managed awkwardly.

His body was frozen, limbs quite simply unresponsive. Yet, despite his motionless demeanour, his mind was going into overdrive, every thought starting with *Dream* and ending with *Dream* twice over. It was all he could think about, his thoughts consumed with the man before him. He was very tall, Sapnap certainly wasn't lying about that, and his eyes looked greener in person; over the camera, they verged on hazel but here they were brighter, similar in colour to a forest, to the sea early in the morning, to—

His useless metaphors were snuffed by the welcome interruption of two strong arms wrapping around him, pulling him against a solid body, his face pressed into the crook of a neck.

“Hi!” Dream mumbled into George's hair.

“Hi.” George laughed softly, moving his arms to wrap around Dream’s waist. He wondered if Dream could feel his pulse, how it was racing, how it roared through his ears so loudly that it was a miracle he could hear anything going on around him at all. It was so strange, almost overwhelming, being able to put a body to the voice, see a physical person speak and—well—sound like Dream and it only made him smile when Dream held him just a little closer after George had started to pull away.

“Can you hurry *up* , Clay? I wanna meet him!” He heard Sienna whine, and he felt the way Dream’s chest shook with those little chuckles that the microphone would only just pick up on a call and wondered how he had ever gone without hearing them in real life.

“Sienna! He’s literally hugging his boyfriend for the first time, give him a moment.” Dream’s older sister sighed.

George stiffened. *Boyfriend?*

“Can they be all sappy later? I think I’m gonna be sick at how sweet this is.” Another voice grumbled—Dream’s little brother Dylan, he guessed.

“ *Shit* .” Dream mumbled, quiet enough that only George would hear it.

“What the *fuck* is going on, Dream?” George hissed into his shoulder, attempting to wriggle out of Dream’s grasp but firm arms held him in place.

“ *Fuck*- I... just go with it, *please*, I’ll explain everything later.” Dream begged softly and George only hummed in response as he finally maneuvered out of the hug with a big smile and as little confusion on his face as he could manage.

“Finally- George!” Sienna greeted him cheerfully, giving him a quick hug.

“Drista!” he mimicked jokingly, matching the excitement in her voice.

“You’re tiny, you know that?” She guffawed, “I’m almost taller than you and I’m fourteen. And a girl.”

“Don’t be so rude to our guest!” Sarah chided, but George only laughed.

“You’re all just freakishly tall!” he shot back over his shoulder to Sienna as he was dragged away by Dream to meet the rest of his family; There was his older sister, Maddison, who he had seen in many photos but never actually spoken to and his younger brother, Dylan, who gave him a polite wave before darting away. Of course, there was Sarah, but she didn’t need much further introduction, and her husband, Mark, only looked *slightly* intimidating but George didn’t dwell on it and then there was his Grandpa, Harold, who gave him a stern look before smiling welcomingly.

They seemed like a lovely family, and for that, he was thankful at least. They had the typical charm that George thought of as so unabashedly American wherein they immediately just acted as if he was a long-term family friend rather than a stranger and it was nice. So much so, that he almost forgot the whole situation until Sienna told him to go and get his boyfriend. And so he did go to get Dream, but he didn’t intend on returning him to Sienna before he could finally have a word with him in private.

“What the hell is going on, Dream?” George spoke quietly, but with undisputable intensity. “Why do they keep on calling me your boyfriend?”

“Fuck.” Dream groaned, throwing himself clumsily onto the sofa in the living room they had ended up in. “Well- uhh... funny story, I *might* have told my mom that I was dating you to stop her trying to set me up with people. And she might have told the entire family. Maybe.”

George’s eyes widened in shock, “What the-”

“Wait, just—hear me out, okay?” Dream interrupted him, “Look. I *know* it was a shit move but my mom... after, you know, I broke up with my ex, she just—she kept on setting me up with people. She’d set me up with people, and she’d ask me when I was gonna date someone, or if I’d met anyone and it was getting to the point that I was stressed out to see her because I *wasn’t* ready for a relationship. I needed time to heal, time to grow and it was just like reopening the wound every time... so I told her I was dating someone.

“Of course I needed to give them a name and a backstory and everything and ‘cause I was panicking, I settled on you: it would be believable enough because we talk all day anyways. and you live in a different continent so she wasn’t exactly gonna ask to meet you, and honestly I’d kinda forgotten about it. I mean, aside from her asking how you were doing more often than she did before, not much else had changed.” Dream sighed, running a hand through his hair, “If I’d known you were coming I would have told her we’d broken up or—I don’t know—or at least have warned you or something!”

Dream paused, watching George's demeanour remain still, expressionless. The tension in the room was nothing short of suffocating and George wracked his brain for a response but he struggled to find a tangible thought.

"Can you just say something please?" Dream muttered quietly, dejectedly, eyes glued to his lap. George couldn't help but feel bad.

"Hey, I'm not angry, alright?" George reassured him, placing a hand on his knee and offering him a small smile when Dream's verdian gaze turned to meet him, looking entirely like some sort of wounded puppy. "I'm not mad at you, and I see why you did... what you did but I just—I'm struggling to think about it all." George sighed, "So what do we do now, then? Play pretend boyfriends in front of your entire family for a week?"

"I'm sorry George, but I can't tell them I've been lying, it's just my Mom, she's been so down since Grandma... since Grandma's been gone. She hasn't spoken about it or anything but you can just *tell*, you know? Especially now we're here and Grandma—well—isn't and if I told her I'd been lying to her for the last half a year? I don't want to have to do that to her, not now at least." He started to get more frantic, his words blurring into each other, his hands wringing themselves raw, "look, I- I totally get it if you just wanna get the next plane home, I'll drive you to the airport myself and- and I'll tell everyone you had a family emergency or something and—"

"I'm staying." George cut him off, speaking firmly.

"You're staying?" Dream repeated, the corners of his mouth curling upwards.

"I've just met you in real life for the first time, you idiot! I'm not gonna leave when I've *finally* got you."

"You know that means we'll—"

"Have to pretend to be hopelessly in love with each other?" George finished off with a laugh, "It's not ideal, and it's *certainly* not what I was expecting, that's for sure, but how hard can it be? I mean, we've managed to convince the entire internet already," George snickered playfully, "Your family can't be much harder."

He took Dream's hand in his, delicately lacing their fingers together as an example as he spoke "So we hold hands every once in a while, I don't know—cuddle on the sofa whilst they're watching a couple of times? We can manage that."

“You sure? I don’t wanna force you into this if it’s gonna make you uncomfortable or anything.”

“I’m sure.”

He wasn’t sure.

He knew that it was going to be strange and awkward and probably slightly uncomfortable on multiple occasions but he would do it all in a heartbeat if it meant being able to spend time with Dream. “Now come on, let’s go and see your family, *babe* .” George laughed, rolling his eyes dramatically at the pet name.

*

The day flew by for George; after Dream’s birthday celebrations, a game of monopoly, and so much takeaway he could have sworn the grease was permeating through the pores in his skin, the sleep deprivation had gotten to him by the mid-afternoon. The boyfriend’s debacle was quickly forgotten, and whenever George had a niggling thought in the back of his head, reminding him of it, he just guiltily hoped that, since it was their first day, nobody would question it. Truth be told, he longed for at least one day of normality, one day where he and Dream could just be as they were when an ocean separated them with the added benefit of being able to see, to touch.

But he didn’t let himself think about it too hard. With a shattered brain and sleep-drunk limbs he collapsed onto Dream’s bed and promptly fell asleep in the t-shirt and sweatpants he had been wearing all day, and he’d already had six blissful hours of rest before he was roused by the creaking hinges of the door and then the sudden illumination of the previously pitch-black room.

“Turn them *off* !” George groaned as he pulled the duvet up over his eyes, curling into himself.

“Sorry!” Dream laughed, “I gotta get ready for bed, give me a minute.”

George just yawned in response, hastily rolling over to face the wall as Dream reached for the hem of his t-shirt.

“‘M getting dressed, don’t look.” Dream announced, and George felt his face flush. It wasn’t that

the prospect of Dream being... less dressed was something he had desired before but he would be lying if the thought of Dream changing *right there* didn't make him panic. It wasn't that he was attracted to Dream, just that... as someone attracted to men he could appreciate a nice-looking man, someone with a desirable physique, and he could tell that Dream *did* have just that. Yes. Right. That's what it was.

"Okay, I'm done," Dream told him, but George only turned once the bathroom door had clicked close. It was strange—living with someone, constantly being around them; he hadn't really experienced that constant presence of another person since uni, and even then, he and his flatmates had their own room. Having to share with Dream was certainly going to be interesting, that's for sure.

"What are we gonna do about...?" Dream asked as he emerged from the bathroom, gesturing to the room.

"What are we gonna do about what?" George mumbled through a stifled yawn.

"About the bed?"

"Oh. Well, I don't know what you're planning on doing but *I'm* sleeping in *here*," George rolled his eyes, snuggling deeper into the covers, "*you're* the one who got us into this shit, and *I* need my beauty sleep."

Dream sniggered, "Of course you do."

George narrowed his eyes in mock-offence, "What's that s'posed to mean, huh?"

"Well, if you don't get your beauty sleep then you'll lose all your followers, won't you?"

"Dream!" George yelled, reaching for the nearest pillow before launching it with as much strength as he could muster, and when it hit Dream square in the face, he simply grinned with satisfaction. "Take that back!"

"Okay, okay, I take it back." Dream huffed as he chunked the pillow back onto the bed.

“Thank you.”

“Only half of your followers are there for your pretty face. The other half stays for your *charming* British accent!”

“I can’t *believe* you-”

“I’m kidding, I’m kidding!” Dream laughed, “you’re just *too* easy to wind up.”

“Oh, so you like to see me all wound up then?” George said without fully processing the words before he left his mouth, “wait—*fuck* —that’s not what I meant-”

“You’re such an *idiot* !” Dream wheezed, taking a full minute to compose himself through heavy breaths and stifled giggles whilst George buried his head in his hands, cheeks burning fiery hot. “Anyway we got distracted—sleeping situation.”

“I’m sticking with what I said before; I’m staying in the bed, you do whatever you want.”

“I wasn’t gonna make *you* sleep somewhere else,” Dream laughed, “but ‘cause of this whole boyfriend thing, I can’t exactly sleep on the floor; if someone sees it all laid out, that’s gonna look super weird.” he sighed, running his gaze across the room, “I *guess* I could sleep on the armchair but that’s really gonna hurt my back and-”

“Oh my *god* Dream, just sleep in the bed with me!”

Dream paused, his expression flitting between shock, then confusion, then slowly, consideration. “Wait, really?”

“Yes!” George sighed with something between tiredness and exasperation, “I’m not gonna make you sleep on an *armchair* or something! As long as we stay on our own sides we’ll be fine, right?”

“Are you sure? I don’t wanna make you uncomfortable or something.”

George looked at him through raised brows, “ *Yes* I’m sure, now get in the bed.”

“Take me on a date first George, *damn* !”

“I literally hate you.”

*

When George woke up the next day, it was still dark outside. Or so he presumed when the harsh morning sunbeams weren’t boring through his eyelids. But after the fog had cleared from his brain and the sleep dust had cleared from his eyes, he was faced with something he was certainly not expecting; Dream’s face. About ten centimetres from his, give or take a few. He was close enough to see every little freckle dappling his cheeks, the shadow of slight stubble on his jaw, the rogue strands of hair resting on his forehead--it was a lot, but he couldn't look away. Purely from an observational view, of course, he'd not been this close to a person for far too long. He'd not realised quite how much he craved proximity, longed to be near people, until he was experiencing it firsthand and he felt guilty wanting to take more, to move even closer. It was simply human nature, right?

He spent about an hour flitting between waking and sleep, daydreaming, tracing the contours of his face as they were framed by honeyed morning light, how the contours shifted as the sun rose. Asleep like this, Dream looked so innocent, far younger than the twenty-two years he carried in the frown-lines of his forehead, in the crinkles of his eyes when he smiled, in the maturity, the assurance, his gaze always held. He felt a strange sort of pull to caress him with the most gentle of touches, just brush along the silken skin, across carved cheekbones, along his brow, his lips, the tip of his nose. He felt his hand move with a mind of his own, hovering expectantly before he drew it back in shock.

That was it. Time to get up. It must have been the sleep, or lack thereof, toying with his mind, casting delusions through the gullible cracks where sensible thoughts should have been. A quick glance at the clock hanging on the other side of the room (an old wooden thing which proudly bore the colours of Dream’s favourite football team, little American footballs marking the hours) confirmed his suspicions that it was far too early, and so he rolled over with an apathetic sigh and grabbed his phone from the bedside table, passing the next few hours with mindless scrolling through his Twitter feed and silent TikToks, and when Dream stirred it was just past ten o’clock.

“Morning!” Dream yawned, his voice low and scratchy in a way that George knew would make the stans go *wild* if they ever heard it. And that only made him want to hold it close to himself, selfishly keep it safe, somewhere that nobody else in the world could hear.

But instead of saying that, he rolled his eyes and grumbled, “You’re *finally* awake.”

“Jetlag’s gotten to you?”

“I think I woke up at like *six* or something.”

Dream stretched and George had to actively stop his eyes from trailing to that sliver of stomach that was delightfully exposed by his t-shirt riding up, the hint of abs, the light dusting of hair, the—he forced himself to turn away, cheeks burning, as he leaned over and rummaged through his rucksack that sat by the side of the bed simply for the distraction.

“I think that’s the first time you’ve underslept rather than overslept,” Dream chuckled lightly, clearing the sleep gunk from his throat.

George nodded, moving from his cosy cocoon of blankets because, much to his dismay, it just wasn’t acceptable to stay in bed all day, especially when your friend’s family are being such wonderful hosts.

“Hopefully in a few days I’ll be oversleeping again.” George chuckled, digging through his suitcase for some clothes, making a mental note to unpack at some point.

“You better not be sleeping in too much—we’ve got some stuff planned.”

“How early am I gonna have to wake up?” George groaned, turning to Dream who was simply watching him with a smug look, dripping with amusement.

“I’d say no later than nine.”

“*Nine* ?!” George exclaimed dramatically, “I thought this was meant to be a *holiday* !”

“You are such an *idiot* ,” Dream wheezed. “How are we gonna get anything done if you’re waking up at midday?”

George just rolled his eyes, “I’m using the bathroom.”

“*Barth-rewm*,” Dream mocked in what was possibly the worst imitation of his accent that George had ever heard, and so he simply flipped Dream off before slamming the door behind him.

He showered hastily, scrubbing gracelessly at the sheen of sweat that had accumulated through the night until he smelt pleasantly of citrus and mint. After eradicating morning breath in place of fresh mint, he found himself following Dream down the stairs to the kitchen and was surprised to see that breakfast was there and waiting for them. At home, the most he’d prepare for breakfast would be a quick bowl of cereal, maybe an apple, but sitting in the oven was a tray filled with bacon, a stack of pancakes on the table, periodically topped up by Dream’s father, who was wielding a fish slice in one hand, frying pan in another. And the smell was just *delectable*. There was the food of course, and also an undertone of fresh coffee, sweet syrup and George could feel himself growing hungrier by the second.

“Morning, boys!” Mark smiled, “Sleep well?”

“Very!” Dream responded cheerfully, “It was nice to finally wake up next to George!” he added with a bashful grin, ruffling George’s hair.

George could feel the blood rushing to his head, his cheeks scalding hot, the tips of his ears on fire, both, presumably, suitable shades of red. He knew that he should have been anticipating the “boyfriend” act but it still caught him by surprise. He just nodded in response, forcing a smile in Dream’s direction and very nearly letting out an audible sigh of relief when Dream’s father started to talk again.

“I’m sure it was,” Mark flipped a pancake with precision George envied, “Dream talks about you all the time you know, George.”

“You what- he does?” George spluttered, turning to face Dream who was now sporting a matching embarrassed flush, but Mark took no notice of their reactions, or if he did, he didn’t comment on it.

“Dad-” Dream started warningly but was cut off pretty quickly by Mark’s cheerful response.

“Of course he does! Even before he told us you two were together he would *always* talk about you, telling us what you two had been up to, how much he wanted to go and see you, how much he

wanted you to come and see him—we really couldn't think of a *better* birthday present for him!" Mark chuckled, "Now come and grab some food, I'm sure you are both hungry and there's plenty to be eaten up!"

The pair of them shuffled over to the oven, neither daring to make eye contact with each other or Mark, piling plates up in silence before sitting opposite each other at the table.

"Good morning!" Sienna grinned chirpily, the viscous tension dissipating at a rate that was almost visible and made George thank God for her timely arrival.

"Someone's chipper!" Dream chuckled through a mouthful of scrambled egg, George shooting him a disgusted grimace that was very obviously ignored. "Whatcha excited for?"

"Nothing!" She responded with a cheeky grin, precariously stacking four pancakes onto her plate and dousing them in maple syrup before taking the seat next to George.

"Nothing? That sounds a lot like you're hiding something." George shot her a dubious look, to which she just laughed pointedly in response.

"Seriously, I'm just happy to have Georgie here with us." She rolled her eyes, wrapping an arm around him and squeezing hard enough that George could have sworn he heard a rib crack.

"Let go of him, dumbass!" Dream wheezed, "You're actually gonna hurt him!"

"Jeez, no need to get possessive," Sienna loosened her grip on George, throwing her hands up defensively, "I'm not coming for your boyfriend, I promise!"

"I wasn't—" Dream started, before taking a deep breath, collecting his thoughts, and speaking again, "You know what, it's not like anyone could ever take him from me anyways, he loves me *too* much."

"I can think of a few people..." George trailed off, "Chris Hemsworth is pretty hot for one—"

"*George* !" Dream whined dramatically, slamming his head on the table, dangerously close to his

plate.

“I’m kidding, I’m kidding!” George rolled his eyes, chewing another delicious mouthful of bacon before reaffirming, “I’d never leave you for *anyone* .”

“Not even Chris Hemsworth?” Dream asked softly, looking up from where his head was resting on the table through those thick brown eyelashes that framed veridian eyes so beautifully that he almost forgot to answer, mind plagued with thoughts that made his heart race and perhaps shouldn’t be voiced at the breakfast table, thoughts that included Dream looking up at him like *that* so prettily.

“Not even Chris Hemsworth.”

Dream attempted to keep his expression neutral but a smile quickly came cracking through, pinching at the corners of his eyes, upturning his lips.

“Love you.” he smiled innocently, still looking up from the table and George’s heart just *melted* . This man was going to be the death of him, there was no way he could make it through this holiday. They would have to tell his parents that their poor son had passed in Florida of all places, cause of death: Dream’s affection. Dream’s *fake* affection.

So, to mitigate the situation, (the situation being his heart beating at a rate fast enough to get him a speeding ticket) George just muttered a quick, “I know you do.” before shovelling in a rather large mouthful, hoping the awkwardness would be written off as his desire for pancakes.

“You two are so cute!” Sienna mocked, voice dripping with sarcasm, “What are you gonna do today? Hold hands and skip through the woods?”

“Yep, that was the plan!” Dream grinned, standing up fast enough that his chair screeched against the floor painfully, grabbing his empty plate, “Come on Georgie, we’ve got romance to partake in.”

“Gimme five minutes, I’m not done eating.”

“But the romance!” Dream exclaimed dramatically as he placed his cutlery into the dishwasher.

“But my breakfast!” George mocked him, punctuating his point with yet another mouthful of pancake.

*

Needless to say, the pair of them did not partake in such romance over the course of the day. Instead, it was wasted away in a similar manner to how they would spend their time apart; playing Minecraft, editing videos and talking about absolutely fuck all for hours on end, their friends on the other end of the line. Dream reluctantly allowed George to use his PC which, although was not quite as high-tech as their respective computers back at home, was leagues better than George’s decade-old gaming laptop that he had brought along with him. And Sapnap and Quackity didn’t hesitate to call him a simp because of it.

George thought humorously that he would put up with the teasing over playing with five fps any day.

Aside from the occasional brief visit of a family member (especially Sienna, who delighted in the iconic sibling ritual of opening the door, standing in the doorway, observing for a moment and then leaving) they were largely left alone for the day and honestly, George was glad for it. The heavy fog of tiredness veiled every thought, his limbs clumsy, his words almost slurred at some points, but despite Dream’s many protests for him to get some rest, George insisted on coming down and eating dinner with the rest of the family.

The sun hung low, bleeding apricot and peach into the tulle-like wisps of clouds when Dream and George were summoned. Although, George did consider summoned to be a little off the mark—it was far cruder in reality; Sienna yelling loud enough that surely it could be heard in the town a couple of miles away that the food was ready, and then repeating it a couple of minutes later when nobody made a move from what was occupying them. Any reluctance to move from Dream’s computer was quickly replaced by deep-rooted hunger at the mouth-watering scent of the barbecue that only intensified as they got closer.

The sun-warmed grass was soft under bare feet and the fleeting remnants of the summer day’s breeze caressed gently the bare skin of his arms, his legs, his face and he closed his eyes for a second just revelling in it all because if this wasn’t true bliss then surely he’d missed something pretty damn incredible. As more and more people appeared from whatever they’d spent their afternoon doing, presumably led, as George was, by their grumbling stomachs and the enticing scent of the food cooking away, the chatter steadily crescendoed and George was rather content with just standing by Dream’s side, half-listening to him animatedly wittering on about something he’d already told George to Maddison, who occasionally interjected with halfhearted comments.

They were steered to some picnic tables sat at the fringe of the wood where plates of burgers and kebabs, corn glistening with golden butter and salads of different sorts sat waiting, just demanding George's starving gaze.

"I am *so* glad I stayed up for this." He told Dream as they took a seat on the rickety bench, wincing as it groaned under their weight.

"As long as you're not too tired-"

"Do you think I'd pass up on food this good?" He exclaimed dramatically, before turning to Dream's mother, who was sitting opposite them, "Sarah, this looks delicious, thank you so much."

"It's no problem at *all* , honey." she chuckled softly, "Now dig in before it gets cold!"

George wasn't going to argue with that.

Unsurprisingly, the food tasted as good as it looked. And despite the pull of sleep becoming increasingly more tempting as the late afternoon was ever closer to evening, with dusk nipping at its heels, their dinner was passing just wonderfully.

Until George felt something brush his hand, where it was resting on the table. And a quick look down confirmed his suspicion that it was Dream. And moments later their fingers were locked together.

He whipped his head to the side, where Dream just shrugged and George could feel his pulse getting faster and faster, feel it in his chest, in his head, at the points their fingers met and his sleep-deprived brain knew nothing better than to yank their hands apart, cradling it in his lap and glaring as subtly as he could to Dream.

And then he turned to face Sarah, who had clearly been watching them both.

The rest of the dinner had a different tone; it was clear that the rest of the group was completely oblivious to the awkward tension that hung between Dream and George, and George couldn't help but to internally curse that he'd fucked it all up.

And this all only amplified when Sarah approached him, Dream and his siblings once dinner was over.

“Sorry, could I grab the boys for a second?” Sarah asked with a smile as she approached the group, beckoning for the two to follow. George shot Dream a look of trepidation, but Dream only shrugged hopelessly, the pair of them traipsing behind his mother into the outskirts of the woodland.

Sarah stopped when the animated conversations had faded to a background hum and the thicket blocked out the garden, the trees blocking out most of the last shreds of sunlight, turning to face the two of them expectantly.

“What’s up?” Dream asked hesitantly.

“George, Clay. You two know that we all *fully* support your relationship, don’t you?”

“Yeah?” Dream responded hesitantly, punctuated with a confused glance shot in George’s direction.

“Clay, you know that we’ve always told you that we’ll love you no matter who you love—and of course the same applies to you, George: we all love you already!”

“Mom, where are you going with this?”

“Look, we’ve noticed that you two don’t seem particularly comfortable around everyone and I just wanted to remind you that you don’t need to worry about... expressing your love around us here, nobody is going to judge you if you hold hands, or cuddle, or kiss or—”

“Okay, okay, we get it!” Clay chuckled nervously, gingerly reaching for George’s hand in a feeble attempt to soothe his mother’s nerves. George just smiled awkwardly, squeezing Dream’s clammy hand before swinging it between the pair of them.

“That was all, I need to get back to the washing up, I left Dylan in charge and I’m sure he won’t have done anything!” Sarah chuckled lightheartedly, before hurrying back to the garden.

“Well,” Dream started with a grimace.

“Well.” George echoed, “At least your family isn’t homophobic?”

Dream just lost it. He laughed with laughs that shook his body, stole the breath from his lungs, reduced his bones to jelly until simply standing was too much effort, resting his body against a trunk until he gave in and slid down, slumped on the forest floor.

“I’m sorry,” Dream wheezed, brushing hysterical tears pricking at his eyes, “It’s just— it’s just—”

George just stood there, bewildered as, for a lack of better words, Dream lost his shit below him, wheezing and heaving until he somehow managed to compose himself, heaving deep breaths until it steadied, heaving himself up to standing once more.

“Are you done?” George asked, arms crossed tightly across his chest.

“Yes, alright, I’m done!” Dream gasped, attempting to calm his breathing and using the tree trunk to help himself up.

“What even was it that was so funny?”

“You’re right, at least they’re not homophobic— I just assumed that she was gonna question whether our relationship was real and she thought we were worried about the rest of them being *homophobic*. ”

“I guess that means we’ve got to up our game then.” George chuckled lightly.

Dream’s paused and his expression suddenly dropped, all the humour replaced with solemnity. “Are you alright with that though? I mean earlier you weren’t so happy when I—you know—”

“Yeah, it’s fine, I just—I wasn’t expecting it I think...” George responded introspectively, taking a deep breath before speaking, “I’ll be fine from now on.”

“You’ll- you’ll be fine with holding hands then?”

“Yes.”

Dream’s eyes narrowed, “And cuddling?”

“Yes, Dream, and cuddling.” George sighed.

“And-”

“And anything! You can do anything! Fuck it- you can even *kiss* me if you need to!” George laughed, exasperated.

“If you say so.” Dream responded dubiously, before adopting a much lighter tone, “Are you gonna get in the pool with the rest of us?”

“Yeah, I think so.” George yawned, “The later I stay up, the less the jet lag is gonna get to me.” He added to ease the concerns he could practically see running through Dream’s head.

When they approached the garden once again, Dream’s siblings were already by the pool; Maddison was taking photos of the sunset from her sun lounger, Sienna swimming lengths and Dylan just lazing on a lilo.

“What was that about?” Sienna asked, twisting out of a tumble-turn.

“Oh, nothing important—just Mom being Mom, you know?” Dream responded dismissively, peeling off his shirt and George very pointedly averting his gaze from Dream’s abs.

“George, you are allowed to ogle at your own boyfriend,” Maddison amusedly commented.

“I- you- I wasn’t *ogling* at Dream!” George stuttered, shielding his beet-red face with clammy

hands.

“Oh you were *totally* ogling him!” Sienna giggled, flicking water in their direction.

“I wasn’t—oh my god!”

“It’s okay, George, you know I don’t mind you looking.” Dream smiled mischievously, placing a hand on George’s arm. George took this as an invitation to remove his face from his hands and instead, bury it in Dream’s shoulder.

“*Dream !*” George whined comically, “You’re not helping!”

He hadn’t quite realised how intimate the position was until Dream moved to wrap his arm around George’s waist, pulling him closer. They were chest to chest, only the thin fabric of George’s tee separating hot, silken skin and his mouth was resting dangerously close to the crook of Dream’s neck, so much so that his mind started wandering, deviously debating how Dream would react if he tilted his head up just an inch, connected chapped lips to sun-darkened tan, how sweetly Dream would moan if he just sucked a little, blemishing the skin just above his jugular with mulberry marks that would suit him so beautifully.

But then he felt jostling, and moments later they both hit the water with a rather impressive splash that painted the limestone where they had been standing a moment earlier a shade darker.

“Dream!” George yelled once he’d managed to untangle their limbs and push his head above the water, “What the fuck!”

Dream just wheezed in response, paddling forward until his feet could reach the bottom.

(Which, of course, wasn’t particularly far from the deepest part of the pool, much to George’s dismay.)

“Now my shirt is all soggy!” George grovelled.

“*Now my sh-urht is aw-ll soh-gee!*” Sienna mocked him, being hit in the face with said shirt just

moments later and yelping in response.

“You asked for it.” George shrugged smugly.

“Okay maybe, but now you’ve gotta pool-wrestle with me.” She responded definitely as she chucked the sopping-wet shirt out of the pool.

George frowned in confusion, “What’s pool wrestling?”

“Well,” She grinned cheekily, “You get on Dream’s shoulder, I get on Dylan’s, first person to fall off loses!”

“I don’t know, there’s no way Dream could carry me on his shoulders-”

“Oh I could definitely carry you on my shoulders!” Dream laughed, “Come here, let’s try.”

George shot him a hesitant look.

“Come on, George! What’s the worst that can happen?”

“Fine...” George responded hesitantly, making his way over to Dream, who instructed him on what to do before sinking underwater and just moments later he was thrust up about a metre. He quickly grabbed hold of Dream’s head in an attempt to stabilise himself as they swayed side-to-side for a second, but balance was quickly regained.

“I told you!” Dream bragged, and George just laced his fingers through dirty blond locks, browned by the water, and tugged a little, just chuckling at the wince he garnered.

It turned out that George and Dream were very good at pool wrestling.

Despite the fact that they had lost count of points pretty quickly, it was blatantly obvious that George and Dream had the majority of the wins. George put it down to luck: Dream pinned it on their chemistry.

But once the sleepiness caught up to him and muscles were aching from all exertion that, as a streamer by profession, George quite frankly wasn't used to, he found himself at the deep-end resting on the poolside stone, his forearms stacked and his chin resting on them as he watched the final embers of the sunset. Peeking through the valleys were the final fuschia-tinged clouds, clinging desperately to a sun recently gone.

He found the ripples of the others in the pool quite calming, lapping softly at his back like the fond licks his cat would give him, he remembered so fondly, and just as his eyelids were getting weightier, sinking lower and lower until his vision blurred, there was a presence behind him.

"Don't fall asleep just yet." Dream chuckled softly from somewhere behind him as the little waves became larger, the splashing, closer.

"M not!" George mumbled, before sharply sucking in a breath as Dream's chest made contact with his back, arms winding around his and chin resting on his shoulder.

"Is this okay?" Dream whispered into his ear and George couldn't help the shudder that ran down his spine. George just nodded reluctantly in response.

"Sienna's watching. She was just asking about us." Dream murmured, keeping the same low voice that George just craved as soon as it stopped, revelling in the way that hot breath fanned across his ear, the way Dream's broad figure wholly engulfed him, the way he could feel each of his muscles press against his own pale skin.

"Oh." George just about choked out when his brain finally managed to spew a coherent thought.

"You were watching the sunset?" Dream asked softly as his thumbs traced idle shapes on George's elbows, leaving a burn in their wake in such a way that George was sure that he'd be able to feel it for days—maybe even weeks.

"Yeah," George muttered, stifling a yawn, "It was pretty."

Dream chuckled as he started to pull away, "We should probably get out, otherwise you're gonna fall asleep here and I'll have to carry you in."

George immediately missed the warmth Dream had engulfed him in, he missed the feeling of Dream's arms around him and for a fleeting moment he considered how great it might feel for Dream to carry him, but he roughly scrubbed those thoughts away with his course towel, only for them to quickly return in his dreams that night ten times over.

Chapter End Notes

I told myself I'd finish this chapter almost every day this week.

spoiler alert: i finished it about five minutes before posting

I haven't actually edited much of this, although the majority has been read over by the wonderful kat [@mushbloom](#) and lee [@putthycat](#), love you both! I will go through and edit it tomorrow (probably)

looking forward to seeing you guys next Thursday for c3!

Arti :D

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Sweet dreams bring George to a realisation, and a rainy day brings baking and movies

Chapter Notes

this is completely unedited and unbetaed. it is 11:30pm and I am very sleepy. I'll edit it tomorrow I promise!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When George roused the next morning, he was glad to see that the sun had risen before him this time; light streamed through the gaps in the curtains, a blustering wind tossing them around as they clung for dear life to the railings. The steady beating of fat raindrops on the roof above them had been a welcome presence while he was sleeping but, as he wrestled from the grasps of rest, it became more of an annoyance, closer to a throbbing headache that makes a home in the corner of your mind—never agonising, but an irritating constant.

You see, usually when George usually it would be with an empty mind. He wasn't ever much of a dreamer, having the occasional one here and there, but not often were they anything notable.

But this day had been an outlier.

Dream had consumed the day before, constantly by his side, in his field of vision, and it had seemed that that had carried over into his dreams as well. Where real life had ended with them stumbling up to their room, falling asleep in silence on their respective sides of the bed, in his dream...

Well.

In his dream, it didn't quite end there.

In his dream, they'd kissed in the pool. Slow and languid, sweet and heartfelt, seeped with unspoken vows and unfiltered emotion. In his dream, Clay had held him close, whispered amorous words into his ears, pressed little pecks to his lips, his temples, his nose. In his dream, he'd had the confidence to accept the feelings that he had been suppressing for so long.

In his dream, Clay had felt the same way.

He knew he couldn't push his feelings away any longer. No more was there any joy in being untruthful.

Quite simply, he had a crush on Dream.

He tossed around the phrase in his head feeling how the way it moulded around thoughts, the taste of it on his tongue. It should have been bitter. He *wished* it had felt bitter. But instead it was saccharine—syrupy and thick with all the feelings he'd pushed down for so long. If it was bitter, then he could have convinced himself it was wrong.

If it was wrong, then why did it feel so fucking good?

Perhaps he could pretend that Dream liked him back while they made a mockery of his emotions, acted a pantomime out of what he longed for. But he was terrified—now that he'd had a taste for what being with Dream would be like, he would only want it more. Perhaps a week of it would be enough to sate him for the time being: perhaps it would just add fuel to the fire.

Either way, George knew that he was well and truly screwed.

*

Breakfast was filled with irritated grumbles over bacon and waffles.

They had planned to go on a hike today, a hike that, according to Sienna, George wasn't allowed to leave without having done. But the wind howled as it shook the trees and the rain was so heavy he could barely see a few metres into the garden.

All the weather talk reminded him of home.

He couldn't help but to chuckle at that. Perhaps the world had gotten one of the stereotypes about Brits correct.

And so with begrudging sighs they let the storm win this time, insisting that if the weather was better by tomorrow they would complete it then instead.

George was expecting to be allowed to retreat back to Dream's room and waste away the day within the confines of lime-green walls, quite like how they had the day before.

What he hadn't anticipated was Sarah's List of Rainy Day Activities.

"What's that?" George asked with a frown.

"Over here, we don't like *any* day at the cabin to go to waste. And so a while ago I started to compile a list of the activities we can do indoors as a family!" Sarah explained excitedly, George flashing her a humouring smile before she continued, "I know, Clay has said that you do have to do one of your streams today but aside from that I don't want you two to spend any more time holed up in his room. We are going to have a *fantastic* time doing some family activities altogether, and the list helps us decide."

George felt a cocktail of conflicting emotions. On one hand, he couldn't help but smile at how sweet Sarah's enthusiasm was: on the other, he had never felt guiltier about lying. She considered him part of the *family*, he'd barely been here for three days and yet here she was, treating him like a fifth child and he was exploiting her kindness, deceiving her with some twisted act, a twisted act that he was gaining *pleasure* from. He felt momentary disgust at how easily, how willingly he had lied to her, how delighted she had continued to be at their relationship; how crushed she would be when she inevitably found out, how nauseating it would be for her to find out that he had been taking advantage of her son to entertain some sick unrequited crush.

But, in the corner of his eye, he could see Dream watching with curiosity the little ways his internal battle seeped through the confines of his brain and betrayed him with little twitches of his nose, the furrowing of his brow and he wasn't going to let Dream in on this one just yet. So, he opted to shake the thoughts from his mind, clearing them like some sort of etch-a-sketch with a quick scrunch of his face, before whispering, "Where did she go?"

“She put the list on a wheel.” Dream sighed, exasperated. George felt relief rush through his body when Dream had chosen not to comment on how deep George had been in thought, numbing the remnants of his anxieties like a drug

George managed a teasing smile, “A wheel?”

Dream chuckled softly and George tried so hard not to notice how they were so close George could feel Dream’s breath caress the side of his face, especially with the way his thoughts were still waging a silent war in the deep, dark corners of his brain, where every longing thought was matched with two mortified ones, but, totally oblivious to this, Dream just spoke, “Yeah, like in a game show.”

George just shot him a look that was wholly unconvinced as Sarah returned, wheel in hand.

“George, seeing as you’re our guest, would you like to do the honours?” Sarah asked him as she ushered him towards the technicolour wheel, now sat on the kitchen table.

George felt his heart drop. “Oh I don’t know, Sarah, I don’t want to intrude on your family traditions or anything—”

“No, no, I insist! Come on, you have to spin it twice, alright?” Sarah responded definitely, and so, with a final glance to Dream, who was just smirking with faux-encouragement, much to George’s disdain, and a quick scan of the rest of the family standing, observing, waiting, he spun the wheel once, twice, before turning to Sarah with a smile shrouding all his shame and retreating to the comfort of his spot at Dream’s side.

“Okay then! Today we will be baking and watching a movie!” Sarah announced triumphantly.

“Can we make cupcakes? I want some chocolate ones” Sienna chipped in.

Sarah nodded, “We can make cupcakes! George, what movie do you want to watch?”

Before George had the time to protest, Sienna snickered, “Please choose something good, otherwise Maddie will make us watch Marvel.”

Dylan nodded in agreement, barely looking up from his phone.

“They’re good movies!” Maddison responded defensively.

George could sense that any objection would be met with Sarah’s stubborn insistence, and so he caved. “Fine, what about one of the Harry Potter movies?” He suggested hesitantly, turning to Dream for approval.

“Haven’t you seen those, like, ten times each?” Dream teased him.

George gave him a sheepish smile, “Maybe.”

“You’re *such* a nerd.” Dream rolled his eyes, but the affection was so thick in his voice that it made George feel woozy to the point where he could have sworn that he was going to swoon and pass out at Dream’s feet like some cheap movie love interest. George couldn’t decide whether that would have sold the whole boyfriend thing or have just made it unbelievable.

Once they had managed to settle on which movie to watch, (the Goblet of Fire, George’s favourite) Dream and George were finally free to stream. It didn’t take the viewers long to realise that they were in the same vicinity—with George’s camera being off and the clear changes in volume as one of them moved away from the microphone, it was enough to convince even the most dubious of fans that they were visiting each other.

And so, what was initially going to be a stream training for MCC ended up being a question and answer session about George being in the United States. Of course, certain bits of information were skillfully omitted; they didn’t share that they weren’t in Florida, or why the wifi was so bad and they *definitely* did not go into the whole fake dating debacle. But the fans were happy with whatever content they could get, and, after George managed to convince Dream to take a photo with him with a makeshift mask (a paper plate with his smiley crudely drawn on—the actual mask Dream had commissioned was at his house in Florida, of course) Twitter went absolutely crazy.

After their stream had ended, they were quickly informed that they were expected in the kitchen in 5 minutes and so they turned off their phones, which were blowing up with notifications from friends and fans alike, and hurried down in just enough time that they were only given a disapproving look rather than a proper scolding.

“Dream, George! You two are on cupcake-making duty! Sienna, Maddie and Dylan are doing the

decoration.” Sarah explained the moment they made it through the door.

“It can be like a little date for you two!” Maddison piped in, “My boyfriend and I love to bake together!”

“You know what, that’s not a bad idea!” Sarah responded with a grin, turning to Dream and George, “This can be your first in-person date! Use Grandma’s recipe—do double, you know how much we all eat, Clay-”

“-how much *Clay* eats, more like,” Sienna giggled.

“-how much we all eat, *including* Clay. I’m gonna get out of the way, shout if you need anything!”

“I’ll hang around and make sure y’all don’t burn the house down,” Maddison told them, and Sienna nodded in agreement. Dylan just got up, shooting Maddie a rather superficial smile before reaching for the door.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Maddison asked him sternly.

“To my room? This is dumb.” He rolled his eyes, and Maddie just sighed as the door slammed behind him.

“What’s up with him?” Clay asked as he grabbed an old recipe book with yellowing paper and half the pages loose of the bindings, placing it down on the work surface with great care.

“He’s been in a weird mood for a couple of days now. No clue why.”

“Probably teenage hormones or something,” George chuckled awkwardly, before adding, “Where are the weighing scales?”

“Weighing scales?!” Sienna guffawed, “What do you think this is, a pastry shop?”

George frowned defensively, “How do you measure out the ingredients then?!”

“Cups!” Dream grinned, setting a collection of plastic cups of different colours and sizes in front of the pair of them.

“Americans are so *weird* .”

“Our house, our rules!” Dream poked him playfully. “Now, grab me some sugar from the cupboard, George.”

Moments later, the ingredients and utensils had been assembled into a meticulously neat line, organised in a way that George presumed would very quickly be lost.

“Okay, we’ve gotta beat together the sugar and butter with the whisk first.” Dream followed each faint word with his pointer finger as he spoke, “George could you measure out a cup of sugar?”

George gave him a deadpan stare, “Which cup?”

“A whole cup—look, they have what size they are on the handle, see?” Dream stepped closer to George, taking George’s hand in his and guiding it to the raised part of the plastic where the paint had practically all chipped away but the indent of the increment still remained. He knew he was meant to be focusing on what Dream was saying but all his stupid heart ignored that and decided to beat at double speed instead, and he could have sworn that the shadow of Dream’s hands lingered on his skin just a second longer than it did visibly because he could still feel the calluses on the underside of Dream’s knuckles, the jagged edges of close-cut fingernails, the soft press of fingertips for long after Dream had stepped back once again.

Maybe this ridiculous, high-school crush was going to be a little more of a nuisance than he had initially thought.

The guilt from earlier had somewhat dissipated; although he still had the occasional niggling thought about how he was taking advantage of Dream’s act, he was far too enamoured with his crush standing right there to really make himself care. Of course it was selfish, of course he would probably feel the same shame tenfold when he attempted to sleep later, only to find them peppered with wishes of Dreams filled with the same man he felt so bad for loving.

But for the time being, childish infatuation took hold and he could barely bring himself to move the hands so blessed with Dream’s touch, tear his eyes from Dream’s pair, shaded so gorgeously

with pine and juniper, caressing his face with such a soft gaze.

For the time being, he could settle with pretending. After all, that was what Dream asked for, wasn't it?

"Oh—oh-kay" George managed through a nervous smile, "So I want the purple one, then?" He gestured to the largest of the set, with a "1" marked on the handle. Dream just nodded in response, chopping up some butter into little, crudely-shaped cubes with wonky edges, some at least double the size of others but George supposed that it probably didn't matter if they were going to mix it all together in a moment anyway.

With all the grace of a newborn baby, George attempted to measure a cupful of sugar, only spilling about a third on the floor, a third which Flick quickly bounded over and licked up. Dream added his butter and grabbed the hand-mixer, plugging it in at the wall before holding it in the bowl, and, without a second thought, turned it on.

Which of course caused half of the sugar and butter to fly out of the bowl and litter the countertop like some sort of fake snow.

"Clay!" Maddie exclaimed, jumping up from her seat to grab the mixer from Dream, hastily turning it off, "You're supposed to soften the butter first! Otherwise it's not gonna mix, you *idiot*."

"How was I s'posed to know that!" Dream shot back defensively, while George shuffled across the kitchen, glancing over the recipe.

"It literally says 'softened butter' in the ingredients." George shot him an amused look

Maddison grinned at him smugly, "Exactly."

"You two are just ganging up on me," Dream muttered dramatically, knocking the whisk against the bowl to dislodge the clumping lumps of butter.

George rolled his eyes, shoving the bowl into the microwave and setting it to run before turning to Dream, meeting what could only be described as puppy dog eyes that rivalled Flick's, but he reinforced his heart with tin foil defences and masked affection with impudence as he spoke, "Stop pouting, you're twenty-one."

“And?”

“And we have cupcakes to make, so let's try again now that the butter is softened.”

“You two are like a married couple... it's kinda sweet actually,” Maddison cooed with a little chuckle.

“Like a married couple or... a pair of childhood best friends.” Sienna added slowly.

“A pair of childhood best friends who fell *deeply* in love and are now boyfriends.” Maddison sighed wistfully, before adding, “It's the sorta thing that would be in a movie.”

George just let out a strained chuckle, flashing Dream a hopeless grin which he knew Dream would be able to interpret as ‘ *well, at least they're buying it* ’, before whisking together the butter and sugar successfully this time, the sheer volume of the machine thankfully managing to stave off any conversation about their relationship for at least another two minutes, two minutes that he spent splitting his focus between not getting the sugar and butter absolutely everywhere and watching Dream, who, in the meantime, had been measuring out other ingredients into cereal bowls and setting them next to George as he whisked.

“Time to add the eggs!” Dream grinned, manoeuvring himself so that their sides were totally flush in a way that, to George, was far too warm and soothing, before cracking in two, managing to largely avoid any shell getting into the mix.

With a nod of affirmation from Dream, George started the whisk again, hoping the clatter of metal on metal would drown out thoughts that ranged from his longing to hold Dream, to be held by Dream, to things that were far more sinful and thankfully he'd managed to circumvent the less appropriate ones by the time it had all combined into a cohesive mixture.

Dream then added the dry ingredients, giggling under his breath like some sort of child when it puffed up into a little brown cloud that tickled the back of George's throat, the taste of cocoa and flour sticking to the roof of his mouth. He reached to turn on the whisk yet again but it was quickly snatched away from him and replaced with a rubber spatula.

“Use that,” Dream explained, “Otherwise we will make an even bigger mess.”

It turned out that George managed to make a pretty sizable mess without the aid of the electric whisk. The bowl clearly wasn't big enough seeing as half of the dry ingredients had managed to escape its confines and blanket the black granite countertop in a powdery veil. Dream only watched with a look of adoration that looked far too real for George's liking that was peppered with amusement, but when George proudly handed him a bowlful of what surprisingly looked a whole lot like cake mix, Dream's eyes were filled with a fondness that all but crumpled the frail defence that he had tried to shield his heart with and tossed it to the rubbish.

The batter was then added to the colourful cupcake cases that adorned a tray (they were striped with the colours of the rainbow; he wondered if that was a mere coincidence or Sarah's doing), and he felt himself fall hypnotised by Dream's repetitive movements of scooping and scraping. He was drawn out of his trance by something waving through his vision, something that he didn't quite move quickly enough away from and, just moments later he was looking up at Dream with a chocolate-covered smear on his cheek, Dream grinning as he wielded the offending spatula precariously close to George's face.

"You're such an idiot," George groaned with mock annoyance but as he spun towards the sink, Dream grabbed him by the shoulders, turning him to face Dream—who was now less than a foot away and softly grabbing his chin to tilt his head up, thumb gently caressing George's skin in soothing circles as he leaned in, closer and closer to his face until—

"Can't let any batter go to waste, can we?" Dream muttered with a smirk as he slowly, gently rubbed the smudge away with the pad of his thumb, bringing it to his lips before licking the mixture off of it in a way that only acted to egg on every lustful thought he had managed to suppress so far, their darkened eyes locked in a battle that sparked the air with palpable tension that was swiftly dissipated by a voice from the other side of the kitchen.

"Y'all know we're still here, right?" Maddison interjected with an awkward chuckle. "If you're gonna make out, at least put the cupcakes in first."

"They weren't gonna make out," Sienna rolled her eyes.

"Well from where I'm sitting it sure looked like—"

"We're not gonna make out, Maddie." George cut her off hastily as he backed away from Dream until his lower back hit the hard edge of sable granite. If he thought he had blushed before, nothing quite compared to this—his cheeks were on fire, blistering and boiling as they emanated thousands of degrees of heat and he was sure that his cheeks would be painted with hues of crimson.

“Told you!” Sienna gloated, sticking out her tongue at Maddie childishly before turning to Dream, who George had noticed was sporting a similarly ruddy flush to him. “Now put the cupcakes in the oven, I wanna start making the buttercream.”

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By the time the speakers started to fill with the first notes of the soundtrack of the Goblet of Fire, George had almost recovered from the earlier incident.

Almost.

They had mutually decided through very few words that they would laze on the kitchen sofas whilst the cake decorating occurred. Neutral territory, George internally reasoned, with onlookers to dispel tension.

They’d historically found it immensely difficult to ignore each other (Sapnap always found himself shocked at how fast they made up after arguments), and so, despite the lack of their usual chatter, a silence that perhaps would have been awkward if not filled with Maddison’s bossing, Sienna and Dylan’s squabbling and the general hubbub of cake decorating, they found themselves sending each other memes. Every once in a while they would break into giggles over humour that one would presume only a twelve-year-old would find humorous, or they would coo over pictures of kittens and puppies and other various baby animals doing various activities that made such creatures look so cute. And this rapidly eliminated the residual discomfort so that, by the time the cupcakes had been dressed in mounds of fluffy cocoa swirls, they were fully prepared to be forced to sit next to each other during the movie.

At first, George relaxed at the opposite end of the sofa they had claimed, watching the movie with unrivalled intent, mouthing along to the lines he knew almost off by heart. But then he felt the sofa move as Dream shifted in his seat, squirming until he was half-strewn across the sofa.

George just shot Dream a mockingly questioning look, to which Dream just shrugged apologetically from where he was now, about halfway along the sofa, before turning to the movie.

And this wouldn’t have been notable if only it were a one-off.

Much to George's dismay, Dream continued to shuffle and wriggle throughout the first half an hour until it was too much. Dream's incessant fidgeting was detracting from George's viewing experience of his very favourite movie. And George wasn't going to have that.

"Jesus Christ Dream, could you *please* sit still." He hissed under his breath, not needing to speak above a whisper seeing as, after all that movement, Dream had ended up with his body right next to George's.

"Sorry," Dream sighed, pausing as he visibly mulled over something before whispering tentatively, "Don't you think we should—like—cuddle or something?"

"For God's sake, come here," George sighed softly, watching Dream's expression flash from confusion, to shock, to something he couldn't quite place, perhaps embarrassment, as George snaked an arm around Dream's shoulders. He then pulled up his feet, shuffling until he was laying horizontally before gently manoeuvring Dream until his head was resting heavy on George's chest.

A quick glance confirmed that both Sienna and Sarah were watching in a way that they both probably presumed was subtle (it really wasn't), Sarah with a look of maternal adoration that just made George's heart melt a little and Sienna, with a strange sort of frown that made George want to laugh at the sheer absurdity of it. So, he freed one of his arms from where it was being squashed by Dream's shoulder and laced it through blond locks, falling into a relaxing rhythm of slow brushes, gently scratching blunt nails along Dream's scalp in a way that made him hum in contentment, occasionally working out little knots.

He could feel the tension slipping from Dream's body, which had since managed to flip over and curl his way into George, as he continued his ministrations. Warmth spread through George in little coils of pure affection as Dream mumbled soft words of thanks from where his cheek rested against George's chest, arms wrapped around his waist and legs tangled with George's at the other end of the sofa. Just moments later, a glance down confirmed that Dream had managed to fall asleep—eyes lidded, mouth slightly open, an expression of peace that George had come to cherish.

And so he only continued to run his fingers through those soft blond strands, tracing a three-word confession onto Dream's back letter by letter because maybe then he would be sated with the knowledge that he had told Dream in one way or another.

After half an hour, he caved to the temptation that those deific cheekbones brought and so he ran his thumb back and forth and marvelled at the fact that his skin hadn't been punctured.

With a final caress he forced himself to remove his hand, moving it to rest in the small of Dream's back as the other found a home buried deep in golden locks and, shrouded in Dream's warmth, his comfort, the familiar scent of lemon and pine he had swiftly come to associate with home, he allowed heavy eyelids to fall closed and succumb to the pull of sleep.

If this wasn't pure bliss, George couldn't think of what would be.

Chapter End Notes

this is so fluffy i can't-

subscribe for more fluff, i promise you the majority of this fic is literally just fluff
(with the occasional bit of minor angst)

hope you all had a great week, see you next Thursday!

Arti :D

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

hikes and waterfalls and george's love-drunk mind

Chapter Notes

I've finally gotten around to making a proper playlist for this fic! you can find it [here](#), it is what i have been listening to a lot whilst i have been writing and the songs either fit the fic lyrically, vibe-wise, or both! :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So, when did Clay actually ask you out?” Sienna asked nonchalantly, scuffing her pair of tatty running trainers through the mud with each step.

It turned out that the weather had indeed improved. There were no traces of the tumultuous clouds that had haunted the sky the day before. In fact, there was not a cloud to be seen: not even a single wisp blemishing the expanse of azure that lay before them, bordered by the mountainous terrain and interrupted only by the sun beating harshly on everything below it.

Of course, this turn of the weather meant it was perfect for them to go on their hike. Which is how Dream and George were woken up at eight thirty-three am precisely by six knocks on their door so violent that George could have sworn that it made the bedframe shake. Sienna somehow managed to rouse everyone in the house by just nine and so, by ten o'clock, they were on their way along a muddy path that was merely a parting of the ferns and thicket which led out from their garden into the great outdoors.

And Sienna had decided that, for some reason, this was the perfect time to bother George, who was very clearly struggling to keep up.

(“To let you talk to Dad about the football game,” she’d said so convincingly to Dream, “To get to know my *dear* brother’s boyfriend a little better.”)

“I’m sorry—what?” George stopped, turning to Sienna with a look akin to disbelief.

“Keep walking or we’re never gonna get there,” She rolled her eyes, grabbing George’s forearm to drag him along behind her as she continued at the same pace, “I said: when did Clay actually ask you out?”

“Who says *he* was the one to ask me out?” George shot back defensively, because, of course, this hypothetical relationship still reflected on his pride and George was not going to let his ego be bruised by something fictional.

“I don’t know—maybe because he’s always whining about how you don’t talk about your feelings and all that shit?” Sienna’s voice was laced with sarcasm, but the words made George’s heart race a little. He knew, of course, that Dream was obviously talking about him to keep the act up, to make it believable that they were dating, that Dream was in love with George but still he let his stupid, love-drunk brain indulge in it for just a moment.

But there was no way he was going to voice that, least of all to Dream’s sister, and so he exclaimed with incredulity, “That means fuck-all!”

“*Fine* then,” she flashed George an exasperated look, eyes wide, eyebrows raised, “When did *one* of you ask the other out and who did it?”

Fuck.

George hadn’t quite thought that far ahead.

He racked his brain for anything that could indicate when Dream had told his family but nothing was coming to him, no thoughts forming and so he just blurted, “Six months!”

Sienna just watched him looking mildly confused and on the verge of breaking into laughter, and after a few long seconds filled with only the steady plodding of footsteps, the wildlife and soft chatter from up ahead, George took a deep breath and tried again.

“It was six months ago that he—that *we* started dating,” he spoke slowly, far more controlled.

“And who asked who out?”

“It was—well, it wasn’t really one person, we both kinda... decided on it I guess?”

Keeping it vague, in case Dream had said otherwise. Good work. George gave himself a nice little mental pat on the back.

“You both decided on it?” Sienna scoffed, and the pride George felt towards his deception skills was quickly lost, “What is this—a business deal?”

George choked out a laugh, hoping it sounded at least somewhat natural. “No! It was more like... we both mutually confessed at the same time and— and the natural progression of things was— well—to date.”

Sienna let out a little snort of amusement, “Still sounds like a business deal!”

And so when attempting to sound convincing was simply not working, what was there to fall upon but childish techniques.

“Shut up!”

George convinced himself that he was just speaking in a language that she, a mere child, would understand.

“ *You* shut up!”

“Fine then, I’ll shut up.” George scoffed immaturely, facing straight ahead and picking up the pace a little to a jog, managing to keep a straight face for barely a moment before a cheeky smile cracked through.

“No! Get back here!” Sienna screamed, chasing after him (and catching up very quickly), dragging him back until they were walking once more.

“Don’t worry,” George managed between laboured breaths, “I wouldn’t have been able to run for much longer.”

“George, you ran for, like, two seconds.” Sienna deadpanned, and when George just shrugged, still gasping in breaths, she sighed under her breath, “This is gonna take *ages* .”

“You were the one who insisted on going!” George chuckled, following her lead as they reached a crossroad.

“Yeah, and? How was I s’posed to know you were so unfit!?”

“I’m gonna tell *Dream* you’re being mean to me!”

Sienna laughed incredulously, “And you think he’s not gonna laugh at his boyfriend’s feelings being hurt by a fourteen-year-old?”

“No! Dream’s very protective of me actually.” George huffed defiantly.

“Why’d you call him *Dream* , anyways?” Sienna frowned skeptically, “Isn’t it a little weird to call your boyfriend by his gamertag?”

George spluttered, “Oh—well—old habits die hard?”

Sienna nodded slowly, “If you say so...” but her attitude swiftly did a 180, “So what did y’all do on your first date?”

“Why are you asking me all these questions?” George snickered dryly, though he could feel internal hackles rising at her probing.

“Am I *not* allowed to be interested in my brother’s relationship?”

“I guess...” George mumbled.

“Go on: first date. I want to know.”

“Well,” George sighed, taking a second, “It was obviously while I was in England and Dream—*Clay* was in Florida so it had to be something we could do across a call,” George spoke slowly, scrabbling for things to say that would buy himself as much time as possible, taking in the woods around them, the pure blue sky, the muddy track—looking anywhere but her. “We—we didn’t want our first official date to not be in person so technically we haven’t had our first date—well unless you count baking yesterday but—the first date we had was probably—well, it *was* watching a movie.” George felt his face heat up at the lies upon lies, the pile of stumbling rubbish that he had just produced that had only dug him into a hole with sandy walls that would only bury him further as he tried to scramble out.

“A movie?” Sienna scoffed, “Don’t you guys watch movies together all the time?” The hole slowly morphed into a ring, the pair of them hunched in fighting stances, circling slowly.

“Yeah, I mean, of course we do—of course I watch movies with my boyfriend all the time!”

“Yeah but you guys did that before anyway, didn’t you?!” Each word packed a punch, the intensity increasing with her accusatory tone, each syllable digging into George’s defences, which were crumbling by the second.

“Yeah, but—”

“And I *bet* Nick’s there too—” An uppercut. George’s head started to spin with a mixture of panic and pseudo-pain, his eyes blurring, pulse running away.

“Okay, but—”

“Can you even *call* it a date if your best friend is there with you?” A set-up. The final blow was imminent, George could feel it.

“Come on, I—”

“You know what, I’m starting to wonder if you even *love* him at all!”

The air was knocked out of George as if the punch to his stomach had actually been delivered.

They fell silent. Two pairs of eyes fixated on the path ahead of them, legs moving mechanically, breaths held tight in their chest.

“Of course I love him.” George whispered, barely loud enough to be heard over the dissonant bird's songs, the steady sound of their footsteps, the steady roaring of his heart through his ears.

“But do you love him in *that* way?” Sienna asked gently.

“I do.” George responded under his breath.

“I do.” he repeated, louder. To convince himself or Sienna, he was unsure. “I do love him in that way—fuck—I love him more than I love myself. Dream—Clay—he’s *everything* to me. He’s the first thing I think of in the morning and—and the last thing I think of before I sleep,” he chuckled lightly, voice raw and thick with emotion, “And then I go to bed and dream about him as well. I love him so much it tears me up inside—it *was* tearing me up before we got together but now he completes me, he’s my other half—my better half, and I wouldn’t trade him for anything in the world.

“I do love him in that way, I promise.”

It was painful to admit, *so* painful, but it was the truth.

“I believe you.” Sienna cleared her throat in an attempt to dissipate the choking tension, “Look, they’re waiting for us up ahead, c’mon.”

*

For the rest of the hike George and Sienna both stuck with the main group. He was quite glad of this, honestly—there was no expectation for him to speak aside from the occasional interjection into the ongoing conversation. He could feel the faster pace fuelling the aches deep in his thighs and calves but he knew it was worth it to have the attention off of him for just a moment.

It only took a few minutes for Dream to ask if he was okay in his normal, stupidly caring way and George hastily reassured him that he was fine.

Dream still stuck right by his side like some sort of clingy puppy for the rest of the hike.

The time to think was necessary, and by the time they arrived George was pretty certain that he had thought all he needed to think anyway, and so he tried to forget about his heartfelt confession and focus on the view.

It was pretty spectacular, to say the least.

For the final couple of minutes of their journey, anticipation ramped up by Sienna's enthusing excitement was matched with a steady crescendo. It started off as a soft, background rumble, not too dissimilar to the sound of a washing machine, or a distant train. Soon it was louder, not *so* loud that it would disturb the conversation but loud enough that you could no longer ignore it; loud enough for it to be a constant.

And by the time the trees started to thin and the track widened the roaring of the waterfall caused voices to be raised to be heard, but with the view in front of them, nobody particularly minded.

The exhaustion that George felt after three hours of walking—three whole hours *more* than he was used to—was quickly set to the side in favour of the wonder he felt towards the view; silver threads of water cascaded down banded slate, spray like fine glitter in the light of the beating sun. At the bottom sat a pool, crystal-clear and glimmering like polished aquamarine, only disturbed by the gentle ripples of movement.

“It’s pretty great, isn’t it?” Dream spoke softly, and George jumped a little, having forgotten their proximity, suddenly *greatly* aware of the mere inches between them.

“Oh—yeah it- it is,” George stammered, “It’s stunning.”

George turned to face the waterfall once again, captivated by the ethereal sight... but after a few seconds he could still feel the heat of Dream’s gaze, watching him.

“Have I got something on my face?” George asked hesitantly, swiping at his cheeks to clear whatever smudge of dirt had found its way there.

“No,” Dream shrugged, unbothered, “I just like looking at you.”

“Oh—uhh okay?” George felt his face go from rosy to a deep crimson.

“Not in a weird way!” Dream laughed, gently smoothing out George’s hair with careful brushes of his fingers in a way that seemed far too intimate for their façade, “You’re just... not hard on the eyes, you know?”

George continued to stare at him with a look of confusion. He didn’t want to jump to conclusions—he wanted to hear Dream say it, he *needed* to hear Dream say it.

“I mean—like—it’s easy to just look at you,” he chuckled awkwardly, “It’s a nice view.”

“What, nicer than the waterfall that we walked for three hours to see?” He scoffed drily, looking around to find which nearby family member was prompting this, and yet they were all very clearly out of earshot.

“You’re attractive, George! I think you’re attractive, okay?” Dream blurted and George’s brain just stopped. He couldn’t believe what such a simple confession had reduced Dream to. But somehow, the stuttering, bumbling mess standing in front of him was far more endearing than the suave, effortlessly flirtatious version of Dream that had been put on for the act.

“You do?”

“Yes, of course I do!” Dream rolled his eyes, quickly adding, “*Anyone* can see that.”

“I—uhh thank you?” George stuttered, opting to watch the waterfall behind them to avoid eye contact, following the flow of the river atop of the steep, craggy cliff, to the white water tumbling down the drop, to the disorderly swathes of roots hanging precariously over the edge of the clifftop, “I guess I think you’re attractive as well?”

“You think so?” Dream asked quietly, and George’s stupid, love-dumb heart did a flip in his chest.

“Yes, you idiot. *Anyone* can see that too.”

“Boys, come over here and grab some lunch!” Sarah called from where they had settled on a patch of grass by the bank of the pool and George’s stomach practically growled on command.

“Hungry?” Dream chuckled, and George just nodded in response, letting Dream take his hand and lead him to their designated picnic blanket.

To George’s surprise, once Sarah handed them their food, Dream’s grip remained firm and secure, rubbing little circles into George’s skin with the soft pad of his thumb, and when George reached down to take a bottle of water, his left hand remained occupied. And any attempts to free his hand were met with Dream’s grip simply tightening.

“Dream.” George shot him a deadpan glare that was very clearly not sincere.

Dream simply hummed in response, dripping with faux-innocence.

“I need my hand back.”

It really pained him to ask for it because, quite frankly, he had found bliss in the feeling of Dream’s warm hand. It just felt *right*, like they were made to fit together like this, interlocked. Like his hand had been missing Dream’s for all this time.

“No.” Dream grinned childishly, “Give the water here.”

George sighed, placing the water bottle into Dream’s left hand, Dream’s large, tanned left hand that totally smothered his and definitely could—George rapidly decided that he was *not* going to let his brain wander there. Not now, at least. (Later was anyone’s game really.) But to George’s shock, Dream somehow managed to remove the lid with just one hand, twisting the cap between his thumb and forefinger.

“There you go!” he grinned smugly, taking a swig of the bottle before handing it over to George.

“Dream, that’s *my* water—that’s so gross!” George disgustedly shrieked, snatching it from Dream and harshly wiping the rim against the fabric of his tee.

“Boyfriends share drinks, don’t they?” Dream raised his eyebrows in a smirk.

“Well, we’re not boyfriends, are we?” George spat under his breath, rapidly regretting it as Dream’s expression fell.

“Fuck—sorry, that was—” he cut himself off.

It was harsh?

It was mean?

It was *true* ?

He couldn’t bring himself to say it.

“No, it’s fine. I understand. We’re not boyfriends, I know.” Dream responded curtly, voice lowered.

“Oh *Clay* ,” he sighed softly, feeling his mind teetering on a dangerous descent into meticulous analysis into why Dream had reacted in quite that way, “Look, let’s do—” He squirmed his way under Dream’s arm to lean against his chest, grabbing strong tan arms and manoeuvring them until they wrapped around him tightly. “How’s that?” George muttered softly, “We certainly look like boyfriends now, don’t we?”

“I guess we do,” Dream squeezed George tightly, resting his chin on George’s shoulder. “Now, pass me my sandwich.”

*

The picnic was spent in the same way; George smugly engulfed in all that was Dream. He leant flush against a warm and solid chest, and the arm that Dream had not occupied with eating was wrapped securely around his waist, and he was occasionally freed from his marvellous prison with directions to fetch whatever Dream so desired (to which George would continuously grumble yet

always cave with just a flash of that beguiling smile from Dream).

They made quiet conversation as they ate, conversation about streams they had planned in the near future, about collaborations, about videos and even IRL content that they could do someday when Dream had face revealed. Certain topics remained unsaid—sat on the tip of their tongues, close enough to taunt them, to laugh at shielded smiles, yet just out of reach, just out of reason.

George's mind would travel periodically to how easy it would be to take this fantasy, take this perfect little idyll they had so meticulously nurtured and pat it down to mere ashes of what it once was, and all with three simple words.

Three simple words and it could all be over

Three simple words and it could all be *real* .

But in the meantime, George decided that he'd live out this fantasy with rose-coloured glasses and pretend that perhaps, in another universe, that Dream could maybe say those three words back.

*

"Are you going swimming?" Dream asked into George's hair, where his chin had been resting among soft, dark-chocolate locks for the past few minutes. George could feel every little vibration from each word spoken in Dream's chest. He swiftly attempted to commit the feeling to memory.

"I dunno," George mumbled, "Probably not?"

"Why."

"'Why'?"

"Yeah, why aren't you coming in?"

“Well,” George paused as he attempted to assemble a plausible response, “I didn’t pack my swim trunks.”

It wasn’t a lie, George didn’t pack anything. Technically he was just sent the instructions to get dressed into walking clothes and be downstairs in ten minutes. He had no clue what had been packed.

“Mom has them.” Dream spoke in a way in which George could practically see the rolling of his eyes, despite Dream’s head resting on top of his.

“She does?”

“Yeah, she has everyone’s, dumbass,” Dream chuckled, “So does that mean you’re gonna go swimming with me?”

“Isn’t the water gonna be all, like, gross and cold?” George offered weakly, watching as, just moments later, Sienna and Maddie dived into the water with delighted yells, not showing any signs of distaste towards the water.

“It’s literally ninety out right now!” Dream exclaimed dramatically, removing one of his arms to flail it around dramatically just out of George’s peripheral vision.

“I don’t know what that means, I’m British!”

“It means it’s really hot, you idiot!”

George huffed, “Fine then. Didn’t someone die from—what was it—brain-eating amoeba or something swimming in a river the other week?!”

“For fuck’s sake George, take a risk. Live a little!”

The words were lighthearted but they held a meaning that resonated deep within him for some reason. His brain was an echo chamber, and all he could hear was *take a risk. Live a little.*

He couldn't help but think that there was some sort of significance in that, perhaps resonating with other parts of his life as well.

"You really want me to go swimming with you that bad?"

"Yeah? What's a guy gotta do around here to get his boyfriend to take a swim with him?"

George couldn't help but smile, a small private grin that he had found he practically reserved for Dream, "All you had to say was that you *wanted* me to swim with you, dummy."

*

George knew that he had said that he would swim, but he had found the loveliest place to perch and observe the chaos unfolding below him. The spitting spray of the waterfall nipped at his cheeks, pricking silken skin like dressmakers pins and the rumbling of the water crashing into the plunge pool was pleasantly loud—loud enough to displace all the undesirable thought, every worry, every stress, until the tension that he'd held so tightly wound in his shoulders all but melted away to the tune of the water's descent.

He was rather content just watching Dream and Sienna swimming about, splashing each other and screaming as they went round and round in circles. He watched Sarah and Mark so deeply engrossed in their conversation, laid out on the grass, propped up picnic bags softened with checkered blankets. He watched Maddie humour Flick's incessant desire to fetch, lazily chucking an old tennis ball that the dog had picked up along the walk somewhere when it was dropped at her feet, and turning to read a page of her book in the time it took for the ball to be returned to her.

The only one that he couldn't watch was Dylan; he wasn't sure where Dylan had run off to but George knew that Sarah would be fretting if he wasn't safe, and so he didn't let it cloud his mind for more than a moment.

The serenity was swiftly disturbed, however, by the tight grip of *something* around his ankle, yanking, tugging, and the lack of resistance from algae-smothered rocks meant that he was rapidly sliding closer and closer to the water until his body hit the water with a splash and his head, the rock behind him, with a pretty loud *thunk* .

“Sienna!” He whined, face scrunching up with discomfort as the back of his head started to throb agonisingly, the pain momentarily clouding his vision.

“What?” She rolled her eyes as she emerged from the water, grinning smugly as she wiped the water from her face.

“That fucking hurt!”

“Aww, did little baby George hit his head-”

“Shut the fuck up, Sienna!” Dream appeared next to them, suddenly touching and fussing with concern knit through his brow, “Fuck, George, are you okay?” Whilst continuing the coddling, he turned to face his sister with a hardened expression, steely and vexed, “Sienna that was so stupid! He could have been seriously hurt!”

“You were the one who told me to go and get him!” Sienna shot back defensively, crossing her arms.

“Yeah, I meant—like—to ask him to come over, dumbass!”

“Dream, I’m okay.” George spoke softly in an attempt to subdue him, reaching up to gently brush the hand that was now practically cradling his head, sorting through hair that had turned jet-black in the water.

“Are you sure?” Dream asked, eyes that were previously slit in anger were now wide and owlsh, concern-filled and comforting, the feeling of Dream’s fingers in his hair so pleasant that George had to mentally restrain himself from closing his eyes and leaning into it like some sort of kitten, “you don’t have to swim anymore if you don’t want to.”

Live a little , Dream’s words from earlier echoed through his head.

“It’s all good, I’ve technically not actually gone swimming yet, have I?”

Ironically, George didn't end up doing much of the swimming himself in the end.

Instead, under Dream's instruction, he wrapped lanky limbs around Dream and clung tightly to him not too dissimilar to how a koala would hug a tree as he waded through the shallows of the pool. George occasionally would splash a wave in Sienna's direction much to Dream's delight, and they swam after her with childlike glee with giggles that heartily filled the forest with the exuberance it deserved.

It felt nice, George noted, to be young again.

He'd not quite realised how much he'd missed letting loose, being free of all scrutiny and judgement to simply embrace joy itself. It was freeing to let adult responsibilities be washed away with the lazy flow of the river, let his troubles dissolve into pellucid water and cling to the last threads of juvenescence.

He'd also not quite realised the oh-so-dangerous mindset he had fallen into.

When he adoringly mumbled "*baby*" into damp, aureate waves, he'd first noticed the issue.

The issue not being the pet name, of course.

The issue being that it was not a conscious decision. It came to him so naturally that only then did he catch himself teetering on the edge of forgetting. It was meant to be an act. He was meant to be pretending, and yet? It all felt too real to him.

Perhaps it was just that Dream was so good an actor that he was fooling George as well. Perhaps he should have expected that a love-drunk mind is easily tricked.

But when Dream looked so concerned that he might have been hurt, when Dream muttered teasing words into his ear with such fondness, when Dream practically begged for him to stay near for just a moment longer... it made it far too easy to entertain the idea that his feelings just maybe could be a little less unrequited than he had previously thought.

Then again, Dream is an affectionate person, George's thoughts reasoned. How was he to know that Dream didn't act this way with Sapnap as well? How was he to know that this wasn't just him enjoying the fact that they were finally together in person after such a long time.

The thoughts were planted in his head in the early afternoon but it was only on the way back that he truly gave them time to bloom.

Ironically, George didn't end up doing much of the walk back either.

After half an hour or so, it became painfully clear that his body was very much lacking in the fitness department when compared to Dream and his family.

Painfully clear in the way that he was gasping for breath as he attempted to keep the pace, his mind already fogging over with exhaustion from the earlier excursions.

Painfully clear in the way that his legs were screaming at him in something close to agony until he actually had to stop to take a breather.

And while he caught his breath, recumbent on the dusty ground, the rest of them had barely broken a sweat.

Of course, it was Dream who offered to give George a piggyback, and as stubborn as he was, the temptation was too great. It was initially only meant to be a temporary thing, just for a few minutes to give George a short break.

Half an hour later and his forehead was resting heavy on Dream's shoulder, arms forming an unconventional necklace of sorts as they hung loosely in front of them, mind stuck in the clouded limbo between consciousness and rest. He occasionally would manage to tune into the conversation, catching snippets of sentences as they were carried by the warm, evening breeze, accompanied by the day's final sweet birdsongs. But then the pull of slumber would be too much and he could feel himself slipping closer and closer to the rest his body so desired.

"Go to sleep, sweetheart." Dream whispered as George stifled his fifth yawn in the space of about a minute and with a smouldering heart and a head inebriated with adoration, the echo of *live* ringing clear in his ears, he let himself succumb.

Chapter End Notes

so sorry that this took a while! between being on holiday and general end-of-term/year/school business I have had limited time to write! although this chapter didn't come as easily as some of the others have, i do actually quite like how it has turned out, and, as always, will go back and proofread it (and/or get someone else to beta it for me) at a later date!

hope you all have been doing well!

arti :D

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

George receives some confessions and has confessions of his own

Chapter Notes

just a heads up - the themes of past death of relatives and homophobia/(past and present) internalised homophobia are discussed in this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Though his consciousness wasn't fully lost, George didn't register much from the moment his eyes closed. He could make out strands of half-formed sights and words, of sunsets and birdsong and excitable chatter but the context was lost through his cotton-stuffed brain and sleep-blurred eyes, and he could have sworn that he felt the soft press of lips on his temple once he'd been laid on the bed like an oversized rag doll.

It could have very well have been a dream, yet still, the feeling lingered, the ghost of soft lips haunting his skin as though they were actually there.

George wasn't sure if he even wanted to know if it was real, he thought as he finally let himself fall into the grasps of proper sleep

*

When George awoke, the room was still shadowed in the shrouds of darkness—he could barely make out anything more than outlines of furniture, of curtains dancing in the gentle breeze, of Dream's face, which did not hold the same statuesque quality that it usually did while he was resting. Normally, Dream looked sculpted from marble; his face peaceful and content, his body unmoving, aside from the periodic rise and fall of the duvet covering his chest. Now, his eyebrows were shifting, nose sniffing, his cheeks—god—his cheeks reflected the moonbeams escaping through the uncovered slivers of window.

His cheeks were wet with tears.

“Dream?” George whispered tentatively. He didn’t so much as twitch in response. “Dream?” George repeated a little louder, attempting to camouflage the concern in his voice so as to not cause any panic, shuffling over to the right side of the bed—Dream’s side of the bed. “Dream, wake up.”

But still, Dream seemed just as immersed in whatever nightmare that was bothering him as he was when he woke, and the tears staining his perfect cheeks with liquid silver were breaking George’s heart a little.

Hesitantly, George reached out, running his hand up and down Dream’s freckled bicep in what he hoped was a soothing manner, repeating Dream’s name in the softest tone that he could muster until salt-encrusted eyelashes forced their way open, blinking away the tears that had pooled.

“George?” Dream croaked, sniffing loudly.

The tears didn’t stop falling.

“I think you were having a nightmare or something,” George said, low and gentle, reaching out and waving his arm blindly in the direction of his bedside table for the box of tissues that he kept there. When his hand met flimsy cardboard, he placed it on the pillow, just an inch from Dream’s face.

“Oh fuck, did I wake you up?” Dream asked bashfully, before blowing his nose and turning over to face away from George, much to his dismay.

“Yeah but—but it’s fine, I don’t mind. I’d rather...” he paused, contemplating whether to continue or not before throwing caution to the wind. Fuck it. He can comfort his friend. “I’d rather be awake to make you feel better.”

Honestly, the lack of Dream spinning his last few words into a sexual joke of some kind was far more jarring than whatever god-awful joke he should have made.

“You can go back to sleep,” Dream sniffled, “it’s fine. I’m fine.”

“No, you’re not.” George responded bluntly, but not without a hint of amusement at Dream’s stupid selfishness.

Dream didn't bother to argue with him.

George ran his hand up Dream's back, which was currently facing him, before resting it on his shoulder, gently pulling in an attempt to coerce Dream to roll over and face him. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Dream drew in a shaky breath, "It's dumb."

"If it's making you cry, it's not." George chided in the same tone that one would use to correct a stubborn child, and Dream let out a wet laugh in response, though it sounded more choked than humorous. "What's so funny?"

"I don't know..." he paused, blowing his nose again before continuing, "just that... normally it's me saying this shit to you—you know, 'cus you're so trash with your emotions. It's weird that *you're* telling *me* this sorta thing for once."

"Well, *someone's* got to tell you." When Dream wouldn't follow the guiding grasp that was silently begging him to turn and face George, he turned to rub soothing circles into Dream's trembling shoulder, wracked with silent sobs, with his thumb. "So what is it?" George asked softly, before adding, "if you want to talk about it, of course."

"I'm just..." He trailed off, and George couldn't help but to smile slightly as Dream, presumably absentmindedly, tilted his head further towards the pillow to entice George's circles up to where his shoulders met his neck. George hated how endearing it was. "I miss my Granny." Dream's voice cracked as he spoke, punctuating it with a sniff. "It's dumb, I know, but I really miss her."

"It's not dumb," George repeated, "it's not dumb at all."

"It is. I'm twenty-two, and she- she passed half a year ago. I should be able to cope." He mumbled the words into his pillow, every other choked deep in his throat.

"*Dream*," George's heart had shattered into millions of tiny pieces and he was sure that Dream would be able to hear, that his voice would betray his inner emotions but in that very moment, he couldn't bring himself to care, "you're allowed to be upset."

George could hear Dream suck shaky breaths through gritted teeth, “I thought I was fine with it... her being gone—I knew it was her time to go, that she’s much happier now than she was with all those- those machines keeping her alive, but- but being here... it’s brought it all back.” Dream’s voice was small, strained and trembling. George just continued the circles of his thumb, silently rubbing every comforting word he wished he could be saying into his tense shoulder, a constant reminder of his presence. He heard Dream swallow painfully, drawing in a short, sharp breath, bracing himself to continue.

“Whenever I used to have nightmares as a kid, I’d always go to her room—she never shared one with Grandpa, apparently he kicks in his sleep,” George wanted so badly to press a chaste kiss to the back of Dream’s neck, to bury his nose into soft, blond locks and whisper every reassuring word in the dictionary. “And she’d always tap my forehead a couple of times, tell me that she’d knocked all the bad dreams out of there, then give me a hug and tuck me into bed... and it worked, you know! I used to believe it as well, used to tell all my friends that my Grandma was magical ‘cus she could make my nightmares disappear and even when I knew it wasn’t- wasn’t magic or something, it still always worked...” Dream trailed off, chuckling to himself, “maybe it was magic!”

“Either way, I don’t even know if I was having a nightmare just then... I think it was just memories—good ones—I don’t know if I even have any bad ones that include her, and it just hit me how much I miss her.” Dream had trailed off to a whisper, voice cracking and shaking and sniffles punctuating every other word.

“Can I... would you like me to hug you?” George asked hesitantly, drawing back his hand and trying his best not to take notice of the (surely coincidental) way that Dream seemed to lean towards the retreating fingers.

Dream nodded. It was a small movement, sharp and tense, but George didn’t miss it.

“How d’you want to...” George started, but he trailed off as Dream quickly rolled over, burying his face into the crook of George’s neck and wrapping his arms tight around George’s waist before sobs proceeded to wrack his body.

“Shhh,” George soothed him, tracing stars into Dream’s back with his pointer finger, “let it all out. Just like that, baby.”

The pet name was left ignored. Now was very clearly not the time to deal with it for either of them.

“She’d be proud of you.” George whispered once Dream’s crying was no longer shaking his entire

body and had subsided to silent tears.

Dream shuffled back, peering up from where his head had been snugly under George's chin. His eyes were red and bloodshot, those long, thick eyelashes dewy with tears. "You think so?"

"I *know* so." George smiled softly down at him, shifting slightly to free his arm from the human-shaped mass that was weighing him down so that he could run his fingers through silky, golden hair. Dream hummed in contentment, closing his eyes and leaning towards the touch just like George's cat back home, and it was nothing short of adorable. "She's the one who'd watch your videos, right?"

Dream chuckled, dropping his head to rest on George's chest once again.

"Yeah." He mumbled into the old grey tee that George was donning, "She watched every single one, even though she knew nothing about minecraft, and then would send me a text telling me how much she loved it."

"See? She was your biggest fan—she *is* your biggest fan, and if she could see how far you've come in the past six months? She'd only be even prouder." George paused for a second, and, when Dream seemed like he wasn't going to make a comment any time soon, he tentatively added, "I'm also proud of you."

Dream gave a little questioning hum, not attempting to move his head this time but still tilting his head up to look at George through half-lidded, sleep-ridden eyes.

"I'm *so* proud of you, Dream. I always have been, and I'm certain I always will be. Look at what you've done with your channel, with mine and Nick's as well? I know we all make each other better but it's pretty damn obvious that we wouldn't be where we are without you. And look at all the other careers you've built as well! You've made Tommy one of the biggest streamers in the world right now, you've made Tubbo a pretty close second, I mean you've practically given everyone on the SMP the recognition that they deserve. Everyone around you *flourishes*, Dream. *You're* flourishing, Dream. And I'm so fucking proud of you."

A quick glance down confirmed his sneaking suspicion that Dream was already deep in the throes of sleep. And after a gentle press of a kiss to the mess of Dream's hair tucked neatly below his chin, George closed his eyes and let himself fall back asleep as well.

When George woke again, it was thankfully no longer the early hours in the morning, nor were they being woken up by Sienna to go hiking as they had been the day before. For that, he was thankful for, at least.

Dream's entire body was blanketing him, and their actual duvet had fallen off. It was warm, and cosy, and the most comfortable he had felt in the longest time.

He let himself fall back to sleep.

*

When he woke up for the third time, something was very rudely disturbing his sleep. The mattress was shifting and the blanket was moving and all of a sudden he was no longer *warm*. And so instinctively he let out a little, childish whine, blindly swiping at thin air for the source of his warmth until he made contact with a shirt. He fisted the fabric, pulling it closer and closer to him until he finally let out a content hum when his comfort was returned to him once more.

“As much as I’d love to stay like this for another few hours, we do have to get up at some point, George.” Dream chuckled under his breath, resting his chin atop of George’s chestnut waves, unruly from sleep.

Dream .

That was *Dream’s* voice.

Fuck.

All of a sudden, every trace of sleep laced in his very-much-not-a-morning-person veins was sobered: George was wide awake.

“Oh Dream— *shit* —sorry I didn’t mean to fall asleep like that,” George scrambled out of Dream’s grasp, frantically crawling off the bed and stumbling back until he hit the wall, “I mean, I was gonna move away once you were sleeping but I was more tired than I thought and-”

“George, chill!” Dream chuckled in that gravelly, deep morning voice that, quite frankly, could tell George to do *anything* and he’d listen and there his mind goes again, running away with those hopeless fantasies that only dragged him deeper in his pit of crushes and self-loathing. “We agreed we could cuddle, right?”

“Yeah but- but that was for the fake boyfriend thing,” George could have sworn that Dream’s face fell a little at this. Oh the wild imagination of his love-drunk mind, riddled with the morning brain-fog cast by sleep.

“Well, what if someone walked in?” Dream offered, stretching his arms out in front of him, fingers interlocked until his knuckles and shoulders produced some concerningly loud pops and crunches.

“No-one’s gonna walk in on us sleeping, idiot.” George rolled his eyes, attempting to cover his internal nerves with amusement.

“Well, even still, I happened to quite enjoy cuddling with you.” Dream admitted, grinning, with not even a dash of bashfulness and George was incredibly envious of his considerate bluntness. “Seriously though, thank you for last night.” Dream’s voice dropped all amusement, sincerity thick. His eyes had softened as well, round and unfeigned where they had been crinkled with his smile just moments before. George felt so blessed to get to see his face in person in a moment like this, “You really helped- it really helped me sort out all my emotions and everything and—you know—it was nice to have you here—it was nice to be able to hug you. It really helped.”

“I’m glad I could be here to help you too,” George told him profoundly, “I really am.”

*

“Sapnap, I need help.”

George had decided that it had all become too much. As masterful as he was at bottling up all his emotions and stuffing them in some deep corner to address at a later date (otherwise known as never), it was too much. He could feel his feelings for Dream bubbling up higher and higher, getting dangerously close to spilling over, into the way he acted, the way he spoke, even so much as the way he looked towards Dream.

It had all become too much.

And that is how he ended up deep in the forest, relatively certain that he was lost. And still, he kept his voice low, whisper-shouting into the phone just in case someone was nearby.

“What do you need help with?” Sarnap chuckled from the other side of the phone, his voice crackly and quiet but just his presence instantly calming George. Despite their usual incessant bickering, Sarnap was basically like his brother and they’d always been there for each other.

"I love Dream." He blurted rapidly, clapping a hand rather comically over his mouth immediately after.

"Yeah, and? He loves you and you love me and I love you—on the topic of that, have you talked to him about when you're coming to Florida yet? It's not fair that he's got to meet you and I haven't and-"

"No, Sarnap. I'm *in love* with Dream." George cut him off, immediately regretting it when the line fell silent at the drop of his words.

"What, like seriously?" All the previous excitement was lost from his voice and though the sincerity was what he was hoping for, George missed the way he spoke before. "This isn't a bit or something, is it?"

George drew in a shaky breath, "Yeah, seriously."

"Oh, okay." Sarnap responded slowly, and there was some sort of shuffling on the other end of the line. "What do you need help with?"

"I don't know what to do, Nick!" George groaned as he paced back and forth, scuffing the dirt and leaf litter underfoot, "I'm supposed to be pretending to be in love with him and I am but he probably thinks it's pretend-"

"George-" Sarnap attempted to interrupt him, but George just continued his word-vomit, not taking any notice if he even heard it at all.

George's was starting to speak faster, gasping in panicked little breaths between words as they all started to merge into an incohesive frenzy, "- and I don't know how the hell I'm meant to work out if there's a chance that he actually likes me back because whenever I think I've worked it out it's all an act-"

"George-" Sapnap repeated, his voice rising in both volume and intensity.

George stumbled backwards until his back hit a thick oak trunk, sliding his back down it until he hit the floor, ignoring the little shots of pain as the rough bark scraped where his shirt had ridden up, "It's all a fucking act-

"George, shut the fuck up!" Sapnap practically yelled down the phone line and finally, *finally*, George fell silent.

"Huh?" George spoke softly. For a moment, all that could be heard was the soft forest ambience and the static of the phone line. It was jarring, in a way.

"Take a deep breath, and then tell me what the hell you're talking about."

George let out a groan, burying the hand that wasn't clutching his phone in his hair, and resting his forehead on his knees. "You don't know?" he mumbled into himself, unsure if it would even be discernible on the other end of the line.

"Dude, I have no fucking clue." Sapnap chuckled incredulously.

George drew in a deep breath, closed his eyes, and told him with a shaky voice, "Dream told his family that we were dating a while back." he paused for a second, bringing his head up to place his chin on his arms, which were folded atop of his legs. After another shaky breath, he continued, "You know how they were bugging him about going out to meet someone and trying to set him up with people? It was all too much and so he lied. He lied and said he was already dating me."

"Oh. So Sarah invited you over to surprise him as his boyfriend, not his best friend."

George nodded as if Sapnap could see him, "Yep."

And Sapnap just burst out laughing. Not little stifled giggles or a polite chuckle, Sapnap was straight-up snorting, laughing those loud, full-body laughs that made your chest hurt and your mouth ache and your eyes prick with tears.

"What? Why are you laughing?" George frowned defensively,

"That's the funniest thing I've heard all year!" Sapnap gasped between laughs, banging what sounded like the desk with his fist.

George huffed, "I'm having a crisis and you're laughing?!" but he would be lying if the sound of Sapnap absolutely losing his shit didn't draw a slight smile out of him. Not that he'd tell Sapnap that.

"Sorry, sorry, but that's some fanfic level shit, you've gotta admit!"

"I don't know Nick but I do need you to be serious for a second or I will lose all the confidence I've had to get together to tell you this and won't talk about my feelings for another year."

"Okay, okay, I'm done now. That does make sense though, some of Dream's family members have sent me photos of y'all looking very cosy so that explains it at least."

"Dream's family sends you photos of us?!" George chuckled incredulously, smiling in a confused sort of amusement.

"Yeah, dude! They've basically adopted me since I moved down to Florida."

"That's actually quite sweet."

"Yeah, they're so nice, aren't they? Anyways," Sapnap spoke calmly, though the sound of his grin was far too evident in his voice, "So, you love Dream—like— *love* him and you're having to pretend to be his boyfriend for the rest of the week."

“Yeah.”

“What’s the problem then?” Sappnap chuckled lightly, “You get to experience a little of what it would be like to date Dream—like those little samples they have in Costco where you can try a bit before you buy it, you know? And he doesn’t even have to know you like him! Isn’t this perfect?”

George looked out to the forest, watching little bluebirds flit between branches of the tree in front of him which rustled and danced in the light breeze that swept through the forest like ancient secrets whispered to those willing to listen. The forest whispered its words, and the birds sang back in response. It was a nice view, calming, even. He kept his eyes glued in front of him as he spoke. “You don’t understand, Sap! It’s not perfect; in fact, it’s really far from perfect—it’s awful! I’ve had to spend all week pretending to be in love with Dream like I’m not really but I am and then he does all these couple-y things to be and I feel so fucking *guilty*, like I’m taking advantage of him or something! And on top of that, how the fuck am I supposed to work out if somehow, maybe he likes me back if he’s trying to act like my boyfriend already?”

“Okay, when you say it like that, I get what you mean...”

George let out a pained, lovesick sigh, “It’s already hard enough, you know... being in love with my best friend. I don’t know if I even want to tell him at all.”

“Why?” Sappnap scoffed dramatically.

The birds had moved on, flown away to another tree in little flashes of cerulean. George wished they’d come back.

“What if I fuck up what we have now? Of course I want to date him if he does like me back but I don’t think it’s worth risking what we have already. I don’t know what I’d do if he didn’t want to be friends with me ‘cus of something like this, Nick.” George spoke earnestly, his voice uncharacteristically soft. The confession was raw, honest. George didn’t like feeling so vulnerable, “I don’t know what I’d do without him, as a friend, or as more.”

“George. He *loves* you. I have no fucking clue whether he likes you romantically or as a friend—I’ve literally never seen the pair of you interact in real life and Dream can be a *confusing* dude. Either way it’s definitely not unrealistic, but that’s besides the point. Whether Dream loves you in a friend way or a boyfriend way, he’d never let something like this get in between you. I don’t think he’d know what to do without you either, to be honest. So, I’m sorry I can’t tell you that he definitely likes you back or definitely doesn’t but what I can tell you is that you’re not gonna lose him, if you tell him, that’s for sure. He’s here for you. He always will be, and if he is somehow a dick about it I will beat him up *so* bad when he gets back, just for you, Gogy. But he won’t be. So

I'd say just tell him, if you can find the right moment. I know it's hard, but there's really no other way to know for sure, you know?"

The wind rustled the branches once again, whispering words; their advice, their judgement. He knew they had heard all he'd said, they had seen all that had happened. If only the wind's whispers could tell him what to do now. If only he were one of those little bluebirds he could finally understand what it was trying to tell him, and sing back his response in clashing disharmony.

George drew in a deep breath to steady his voice, emotion making it thick and shaky, "Thanks, Nick."

"Anytime, man. I'm glad... I'm glad you felt like you could come to me with this. And I'm proud of you—for talking about it all rather than keeping it all bottled up like you usually do." George felt a small smile tug at the corner of his lips. Sapnap wasn't often honest like this. It was quite refreshing, in a way. And naturally, the moment was only short-lived, when he started to speak again, "Also I wasn't joking when I asked if you'd talked to Dream about when you're coming to Florida because it is *not* fair that he got to meet you before I did."

"I haven't. I've been a little scared of it, with everything that's going on, but I will."

Sapnap chuckled lightly, "You better. I love you, dude."

"Love you too. Talk soon."

"Talk soon!"

The phone line was silent. George was left alone with the indiscernible words of the forest once more.

*

With a shit sense of direction and a whole lot of luck, George had managed to wander on to the main path back to the house, and when he got closer, there was a voice calling for him, carried on the gentle breeze. Perhaps *that* was what it was trying to tell him. As he neared, he could

distinguish it as Dylan's, and could just about make out leaning on a tree where the path met the garden as he got closer.

"Hi?" He yelled back questioning, picking up his casual amble to a speed-walk.

"They want you to come inside for lunch." Dylan called back, rolling his eyes, "So they made me come out and get you."

"Oh, okay." He responded, but as Dylan turned to move, George grabbed his wrist.. "Actually, Dylan, can I ask you something?"

Dylan scowled, roughly yanking his arm out of George's limp grip, "I mean, if you have to."

"Why do you hate me?" George asked softly. There had been so much honesty today, so what's some more?

Dylan kicked a twig by his foot into the bramble bush beside them. "Isn't it obvious?" He spat.

George just gave him a clueless look, shrugging in response.

"You've- you've corrupted Clay. You made him all *gay*."

He felt like all the air had been knocked out of him. That was not the response he was expecting. He stumbled back a step, as though the confession had made him physically recoil.

"What?" George forced out, though it was no more than a whisper. "What do you mean?"

"Ever since he's known you he's been gay, and now you two are *dating* . It's *disgusting* ." Dylan hissed, spitting words coated with venom, each stinging George a little more than the last.

" *Why* ?" George choked out, blinking back the tears painfully pricking at his eyes.

Dylan rolled his eyes once more, staring at the forest behind George as though he was merely an inconvenience, blocking his view. “What do you mean?”

“Why do you think it’s disgusting?”

“Being gay is wrong,” Dylan spoke, although it didn’t quite hold the matter-of-fact tone that George was all-too-familiar with. And so, he decided to push.

“Why?” George repeated the word stronger this time, with more conviction, more assurance.

“It- it just is, isn’t it?” He stuttered angrily. George noted that it sounded a lot like Dylan was trying to convince himself, “I know it and- and deep down, you know it too.” George raised an eyebrow at that comment, “You’re *gross* , and you’ve made Clay think it’s alright as well.”

George drew in a deep breath and attempted to stay level-headed. He didn’t possess the same short-temper as Dream, but the words were certainly stoking the fire within him. But still, he kept his composure as he spoke, “Why do you think it’s wrong, Dylan?”

“You know what my friends say? They say the homos will burn in hell—you’re gonna burn in hell.” Dylan waved a shaking finger accusatory in George’s face, his eyes wide. The sneer on his face was long gone, and now his expression was more akin to panic than anything else, “You know what they’d call you? They’d call you disgusting, they’d beat you up—call you a fa-”

George’s expression hardened. “Don’t even think about finishing that.”

“What, you’re scared of a- of a *word* ?” He weakly taunted, voice wavering, “My friends—they think people like you should go *die* .”

“And what do you think?” George asked plainly, probing deeper, forcing himself into those cracks that had started to show.

“I think what they think! I think you should- you should go die. Maybe then- maybe then Clay would be normal again.”

That hit George hard. Momentarily, he considered whether Dream would be better off without him, but Sapnap’s words echoed in his ears— *he needs me as much as I need him* , George reassured

himself, before swinging back to the offense.

“You *really* think that?”

“Yeah.” Dylan said, his eyes firmly trained on the floor, fingers rolling the knots of his hoodie strings back and forth.

“Do you?”

“I think... I think- I don’t know, why are you even asking me?!” He spat defensively, that prior scowl returning. A *shield* , George guessed. A *mask* . How *fitting*.

“You don’t sound so sure about everything you're saying. *Why* do you think it’s wrong, huh?”

“It just is, isn’t it?” His shield had been dropped. The mask had fallen. And so soon, as well. His voice was faltering, agitated and apprehensive, “That’s what the bible says, that’s what- that’s what my friends say, that’s-”

“It’s not what your Mum thinks, though,” George pushes, “it’s not what Clay thinks, or Maddie thinks, or Sienna-”

“They’re wrong.” Dylan exclaimed loudly, “they’ve been misled— *brainwashed* , and by people like you.” George gave him a questioning look as he trailed off. “Haven’t they?”

“What do *you* think, Dylan? Do you really think all those things your friends have been saying?” George kept his voice calm and slow, as though he was attempting to tame a wild animal. In a way, it was very similar to that.

“I think- I think...” His resolve was breaking. The cracks got bigger, wider, branching out, spreading through him.

“You can take a moment, you don’t have to answer me now but just... think carefully.”

“I think I might be like- like *you* .”

And there he crumbled.

George let out a gasp of shock, though he attempted to stifle his surprise, “You- you think you’re gay?”

“Don’t say that,” Dylan spat, lashing out with his words, “I’m not *gay* ! I- I’m not a- a *queer* ! I’m not! I just- I don’t know!” He buried his head in his hands, tugging roughly at blond strands as he stumbled backwards.

“Okay... I see.”

“Please don’t tell anyone,” his voice trembled with fear, and George couldn’t help but feel deep-set pity, longing to resolve the conflict set deep within the kid, conflict he was far too familiar with, “you can’t tell anyone. They’ll *hate* me.”

“I won’t, I promise.” George offered him a placating smile, “Have you told your mum?”

“No. You’re the first.”

George’s eyebrows raised in surprise, “Why not Clay?”

“He wouldn’t get it.” Dylan sighed, before his words cooled again, “You won’t get it either and I- I don’t know why I told you but-”

“I get it, Dylan.” George cut him off, voice thick with emotion, “I was just like you.”

“You were?”

“Yeah.” George harshly sucked in air between clenched teeth. “Back when I was at school, I was like you. All my friends—they beat up the gay guys, called them slurs, said anything that was girly or weak was gay, and I feel *so* shit now that I didn’t do anything to stop it, I really do. I had a

girlfriend who just didn't feel right, and I didn't get why I never got a crush on any of the girls but looking back on it now, I had the biggest crush on my best friend." George chuckled lightly at his fond reminiscence.

"When I went to uni, I ended up making friends with a group who were far more accepting—literally half of them were gay as well. And... though I had these preconceived ideas of what was right and what was wrong, my views slowly shifted, and eventually, I considered the idea that I might like guys. There was this one boy—he was one of my friends, we dated for a little while as well and he really helped me." George admitted, the corners of his lips tugging upwards, "We drifted apart years ago but I owe a lot to him. And now I have Dream, and he's the best friend—the best *boyfriend* I could ever ask for." The smile grew wider, and he felt his heart warm at just the mention of *his* name, especially with *that* word alongside it, "I guess what I'm saying is—I was the same, back when I was your age. It gets better."

Dylan looked at him with something between suspicion and hope, "You think so?"

"I know so." George sighed, "Look, Dylan—you've got, what, two years of high school left?"

"Just one."

"I'm not gonna tell you to suddenly change friend groups and be open about yourself or anything, and the next year will probably be hard but you'll make it through it. You've got so much time ahead of you to work this all out, to find people who'll make you a better person. You don't have to have all your shit sorted the moment you turn eighteen—trust me, I didn't."

"Thank you."

"It's alright." George offered him a sympathetic smile, "You wanna go in and grab some food?"

there we go! lots of dialogue, so i hope it wasn't too boring!

only two more to go now! I'm super excited to write the next ones, they're gonna be great!

this one was partially beta-d by prelovedsinner (ily :D) and i will proof-read it when i get a moment so excuse any spelling/grammer mistakes lol

here is my twitter if you want to go say hi [@L4UNDRYBEAR](#) :D

have a good week!

artio :P

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

George is in deep, Dream remembers his Grandma, they finally waltz

Chapter Notes

this chapter is for jj and everyone else who is actually invested in this fic; thank you so much for your unwavering support, i love you all and i am so sorry this took a while but it is a slightly longer one so i hope that makes up for it?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

At first, it was just Dream's hand shifting on top of George's, which had been resting, clasped together, in his lap. They'd been watching *Tangled* with the rest of Dream's family for the past half an hour or so, and, naturally, they'd been forced on the worn, flakey leather loveseat that was, admittedly, incredibly comfy.

Incredibly comfy for one person to sit on, at least.

But, the other seating was suitably filled when they had arrived; Maddie and Sarah sprawled out on the big sofa, Sienna and Dylan on the other, smaller one and Dream's Grandpa on the armchair. Mark was off collecting relatives from the airport or something—George perhaps hadn't exactly been paying particularly close attention when everyone was talking about it and figured it was a little too late to ask.

So, they had no choice but to squish onto the chair, thighs flush and almost uncomfortably warm, knees knocking against each other every time one of them so much as shifted slightly.

And that was already far too much skin contact with Dream, George had thought. But now, Dream's hand was resting on his hand—resting on his hand in *his lap*.

Moments later, long, freckled fingers were lacing their way between his, and squeezing softly, and George would have willed himself to ignore it should it have just stopped there, but then there was another arm snaking behind him to wrap around his waist, resting on his hip, tugging him closer—

“Dream!” George hissed under his breath, rapidly scanning the room to check that nobody else had heard him over Rapunzel and Flynn Rider escaping the tower.

“What?” Dream whispered back with what sounded like a roll of his eyes (George couldn’t tell—*Tangled* was decidedly too important to miss for his fake-boyfriend-slash-real-best-friend’s antics). An amused, amicable roll of his eyes, but a roll of his eyes nonetheless.

“What are you doing?”

When he got no response, he snatched a glance to the left to see Dream, who just shrugged and flashed him a small, sheepish grin.

George let out an exasperated huff. “If you want to cuddle, you can always just ask.”

In all honesty, he was shocked at how steady his voice was. He wondered if it could pass for the voice of someone whose heart wasn’t running away, beating at a rate that was dangerously close to making him dizzy.

Perhaps he could pretend it was just enthusiasm for *Tangled*. He internally chuckled at the thought.

“Can we cuddle?” He responded hastily, and George promised himself not to indulge in the way Dream’s eyes seemed to light up. Surely, it was just a trick of the light; It must have been. “It will look good in front of all of them, right?” Dream tacked on, and George nodded with a fond smile he knew he would have found absolutely sickening on anyone else’s face in the past but he completely understood now. And so, he allowed himself to be pulled into Dream, curling up, snuggling into his side and wrapping his arms tightly around Dream’s left one until he was practically hugging it.

“Is this what you wanted?” George asked, staring up at Dream with a look of nothing short of adoration. Dream looked the best like this, George thought, when his eyes were on him and him only. Call George selfish, but he loved the attention. He’d die for those little private smiles, so fond and gentle, reserved solely for him. Sometimes, he allowed himself to wonder if there was something behind them. It felt a little self-indulgent, George thought bashfully, but it was nice to pretend that behind curled lips there was something more, something *real*.

God knows he could do with something real after this week.

"It's *exactly* what I wanted," Dream smiled languidly and that gentle look flooded his eyes, before leaning closer and closer and all of a sudden, lips were pressing to his forehead— *Dream's* lips were pressing to his forehead. The feel of Dream's soft lips caressing his skin, the little huff of breath that fanned across George's face, tickling his nose, the hot prickle of the intense emerald stare that he couldn't see but could still *feel*— the touch may have been momentary but it felt like time had slowed; as if they'd been stuck in that moment for hours. As soon as it was over, George instantly wished he could relive it again.

"What was that for?" George asked breathily before burying his head in Dream's shoulder. It was a cheap attempt at avoiding his gaze, slowing the speeding of his pulse, but when Dream just answered by squeezing him a little tighter, the butterflies in his stomach grew tenfold.

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"George?"

There was a voice. And it was coming from somewhere relatively close to his left ear, he would have guessed.

George longed to ignore it, the pull of sleep oh-so-strong but, incessantly, the voice spoke once again.

"George?" The voice—Dream's voice, he'd managed to discern—was louder this time, and the arm that had been holding him snugly was now gently shaking his shoulder.

"What?" George yawned, the mist clearing from his sleep-fogged brain as he roused, burying his head further into Dream's shoulder.

"We've gotta go to bed." Dream chuckled lightly, attempting to pull away. George only whined, clinging to Dream tighter. "Let go of me, you idiot!" Dream exclaimed, attempting to pry George's arms from around him but to no avail, "we've got to go to bed!"

George groaned, "Why? 'M comfy!"

"Otherwise we'll have bad backs when we wake up!" Dream playfully scolded him, shifting to sit up and pulling George so that he was now fully seated within his lap.

“Don’t care,” George mumbled into Dream’s chest, “comfy here, I don’t want to move.” He paused for a second, thinking, before adding, “if you want to go upstairs so bad, carry me.”

“Really?” George couldn’t see Dream’s expression, but he could imagine it perfectly; an amused smile pulling his lips upwards, both eyebrows raised and expression sceptical in a humorous way.

George nodded, and Dream sighed over-dramatically but still moved to stand, his strong grip around George’s waist tightening as George linked his ankles behind Dream.

“The things I do for you,” Dream groaned incredulously as he made his way up the stairs, stumbling with the weight of him.

George’s smile widened where it was pressing against the soft fabric of Dream’s hoodie.

*

"You know it's my Grandma's memorial service tomorrow, right?" Dream whispered softly, as though breaking the silence too harshly would disturb the darkness that shrouded them. A breeze blew outside, whistling through the branches of nearby trees and rattling the panes of an unlatched window. Neither of them bothered to get up from the warm comfort of the bed and shut it properly.

"It is?" George asked groggily before coming to a realisation, "so *that's* why your dad was sorting out relatives earlier."

"Yeah, you idiot." Dream chuckled affectionately, flicking George's nose in a way that made him narrow his eyes and frown in disapproval—which only made Dream laugh harder, of course. The moonlight bathed Dream in soft silvery from where it escaped through half-pulled curtains and in that moment George could only think of how truly ethereal he looked. If Dream was a religion, George would be the first devotee. He would worship every inch of Dream's blessed skin, find the meaning of life in the freckled dip of his collarbone and the purpose of the universe in those eyes that glimmered and gleamed like sun-kissed emeralds. He would be on his knees at the flick of a wrist, sate any desire that the god— *his god* —could possibly have. And all just to see him like this one more time.

For Dream, he'd do that; for Dream, he'd do anything.

God, he's so fucked.

“They’re here for the service, I think they’re staying in a hotel or something. There’s not too many of them though, just my Great Aunt Martha and Great Uncle David, Uncle Lewis and his two kids; Tristen and Layla. I bet Mom forgot to tell you about it before you left, didn’t she?”

George nodded slowly, mentally running through the extent of their brief communication over text for any mentions of a memorial service and coming back with nothing, “Yeah, she must have.”

Dream hummed in thought, “I think I’ve got some clothes from when I was younger you can borrow,” he offered, before sarcastically adding, “unless you’ve brought a shirt and some dress pants with you?”

George rolled to face Dream to shoot him a deadpan stare that he hoped the tenebrosity didn’t fully obscure, “Unfortunately not.”

“It’s okay, they’re from when I was thirteen or fourteen but I reckon they’ll be your size, seeing as you’re so short.” George held his breath as Dream’s hand reached out for his face as he spoke, gently tracing the bridges of his eyebrows, the peak of his nose, the valley between his lips, the vast plains of his cheeks. And then Dream flicked him again, this time right between the eyes, and George’s face scrunched and crinkled like it had before and he finally remembered how to breathe again.

“Hey!” George frowned playfully, flicking Dream right in the spot that he’d been flicked with mock-vengeance.

Dream grinned, wide and free, and George watched how the outline of his face shifted, how the lines were drawn up, tight and his eyes crinkled at the edge in his childish glee. “It’s not a lie though, is it?”

“I’m not short,” George huffed, “you’re just *tall!* I’m *average!* ”

“Either way, you’re about the same height as thirteen-year-old me,” Dream grinned smugly, tapping George’s nose, “so, you can borrow my old clothes.”

“Thank you.” George stuck out his tongue childishly, before rolling back to face the blackened ceiling, staring at the intricate patterns drawn out by the cracks in the plaster. They fell into a lulled quiet, not quite comfortable yet not particularly awkward. It was as though there were words to be said, dancing over the tips of their tongues teasingly but never quite close enough to grasp ahold of.

And so they just continued to lie there in silence—two bodies statuesque, petrified, undaring, almost corpse-like. Both heads faced upwards, gaze dead straight, hands either side of their thighs almost militarily. Neither one of them dared to move.

“George?” Dream finally broke the silence. He spoke quietly, cautiously, and George thought he could hear a trace of vulnerability in the single word that fell from Dream’s lips.

“Yeah?”

“I’m scared.” Dream’s voice cracked as he whispered, raw and vulnerable, and George could have sworn he felt his heart fracture then and there.

“You’re scared?” George turned again to face Dream, reaching a hand up to cup his cheek, rubbing the pad of his thumb along his cheekbones comfortingly, “Why are you scared, baby?”

The pet name just slipped out and George froze, his blood suddenly running cold. He couldn’t have cursed himself harder at that moment for being so careless, for confusing fact and fiction, for wanting so badly for it to be true. Dream *wasn’t* his boyfriend, no matter how much he fucking longed for it, but he’d been acting for so long that somewhere, deep in his head, it felt real. Too real. Dangerously real. In hindsight, he had been acting the same way he did with his ex with Dream—both in front of his family and in private too. And that was dangerous.

So the pet name had just slipped out, and George was kicking himself for being so stupid, and yet Dream didn’t seem to even take notice.

“All of it—being here, the memorial service—it’s all making it- making it so *real*.” Dream explained quietly, leaning into George’s touch.

George sighed lightly, “Oh *Clay*.”

“Before I- I guess I could pretend that she’s still here with Grandpa and- and that nothing had changed but now, now it’s actually true.” Dream uttered, voice thick with emotion. “Now she’s *really* gone and—fuck—I feel like a whiny kid but I hate it!” His voice broke at his exclamation, and George could see the way the alabaster moonlight reflected in the glossy emerald of his eyes. “I hate that I’m here and she’s not and now I’m never gonna see her again it’s just- it’s just-”

George continued stroking his thumb back and forth along Dream’s cheekbone as emotion got the better of him, reaching over to find Dream’s hand with the other and swiftly lacing them together.

“I know, I know,” George reassured him soothingly, squeezing the weak grip of their hands.

“I wish she was still here.” Dream whispered to the ceiling, blinking back the tears threatening to fall.

“I’m sorry,” George murmured in response, squeezing Dream’s hand once more in an attempt at comfort.

“Sorry doesn’t *change* anything though, does it?” Dream snapped, before letting out a little gasp, eyes wide, aghast. “*Fuck!* Fuck, I’m *so* sorry George,” He apologised rapidly, stunned, clenching his free hand into a fist and gripping George’s so tightly George was surprised he couldn’t hear the crackling of bones breaking, “I didn’t mean to speak to you like that, I’m *so sorry* please-”

George quickly cut him off with a mollifying voice, “Hey, hey, hey, It’s okay, baby, I get it.” *Fuck! There he goes with that fucking pet name again!* He forced himself to continue with the comfort despite the war waging inside his brain. “You’re hurting, I know.”

“Will it stop?” Dream choked out, “The hurting, I mean.”

“I don’t want to promise that it will stop completely because I think... I think she was very special to you, and I don’t know if it will ever totally stop, but it will get better.” George attempted to articulate his thoughts in a way that didn’t sound as incredibly prepared for this moment as he felt. He dug through the depths of his mind to try and find the right words, the words he would have wanted to hear in Dream’s situation, and only hoped it would make Dream feel a little better at the least. “It will get better and it will hurt less and less until you think of her and all the fond memories you have rather than how much it hurts that she’s not there. You’ll come to terms with it, and she’ll always be there with you, in your heart, alright?”

“Oh- okay.” Dream spoke under his breath, “Could you hold me like you did last night?”

“Of course I can.” George smiled, shuffling closer to Dream to cradle his head to his chest, carding deft fingers through silky, golden locks.

“Thank you, George.” Dream whispered, snaking an arm around George’s waist to pull him closer, “I love you.”

George’s breath hitched at those three words.

“I love you too, Dream.”

He cursed himself for meaning them far too literally, but as his brain spiralled into further panic, gentle sniffles and snores sounded from the man curled into him.

*

"You can do this, Dream," George spoke softly, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder and rubbing his thumb over the ridge of his collarbone. The skin bore a lovely tan, soft—almost silk-like—and dappled with light freckles. George thought it was highly inappropriate how much he wanted to press a gentle kiss there, even if it were for comfort.

"I know." Dream whispered, all choked and thick, laden with everything he was feeling—which, at that moment, was quite a lot. "I've gotta do this. I can do this." George followed his glossy gaze as it flitted between the small crowd of family and local friends mulling around, besuited in various iterations of monochrome and taking awkward stabs at conversational mutterings and the wooden doors of the church that loomed over them. It was an ugly building really, or at least George thought as much; when you are used to seeing centuries-old churches in every village and castles at the end of every road your standards are certainly raised. The walls were wooden and painted a bright white that reflected the strong August sun in a way that made you squint every time you even so much as glanced in its direction. The roof and trimmings were green—but not the disgusting shade of highlighter that he’d grown so fond of or a tasteful shade of sage or mint, rather a darkened shade of a sludgy olive and there was a small, stone-walled chimney that couldn’t have been more than a foot wide and long and protruded from the mid-point of the left wall, looking horribly out of place. It was... sweet-looking if he had to compliment it, but, frankly, it hardly compared to the rugged, crumbling churches and chapels that he was used to, built with ancient

stones and years of history and character infused into its very being.

It almost felt impersonal to George, and he was completely certain that Dream's grandma deserved something far greater: a spectacle of a grand, time-worn building or something of the sort, but then he remembered that this one probably held far more significance to any of them and felt very much out of place if he wasn't already. Yet still, he kept his emotions far from his expression and repeated, "you can do this." with a light chuckle, fiddling with one of the carmine-red suspenders that George had been frustrated to find, couldn't be removed from the navy trousers Dream had handed him. They felt rather ridiculous, but he couldn't really bring himself to care.

"I can." Dream reaffirmed, reaching for George's hand. It was an action that had become so familiar to them over the past week, so natural, something that they hardly even thought about. It was comforting, grounding, to be able to do something like that so thoughtlessly, and George felt a pang of smug guilt that it seemed to have the same effect on Dream.

Their hands ended up entangled for almost the entire service. George kept Dream's hostage for every moment they were sitting next to each other, running his thumbs over the bumps and ridges of Dream's knuckles, tracing lazy patterns into his palms, moulding each lax finger into whatever position he so desired. He doubted whether it was really of any help until Dream returned from standing in front of the congregation after delivering his speech (a beautiful poem he'd written especially for the occasion and had brought the entire church to tears, including George) and he blindly reached for George's hands and buried bleary eyes into George's shoulder.

It was nice to know that he was there to help Dream in his own way, George had thought, and if his selfish heart sang each time someone commented on how he was such a good, supportive boyfriend to Dream, then that was something nobody else needed to know.

*

The day passed slowly, each hour heavy and viscous and weighing on both George's body and mind. The emotional toll was clear on everyone in the puffy bags that framed the red-rubbed eyes that smiles wouldn't reach, in the drag of tired feet and the stilted small talk. By the time they arrived back home, George was very much ready to collapse into bed and sleep the rest of the day away despite it only being mid-afternoon, but he knew he should stay around, do his best to help a mourning family in whatever way he could, even if that did end up being through an hour-long Mario Kart competition with Sienna and Dylan.

"George, son, could I speak to you for a moment?"

The three of them had been so engrossed in their competition that they all startled at the voice of Harold—Dream's grandfather, who was standing in the doorway. With a final longing glance to his character, Toad, who was comfortably driving along Coconut Mall in the first place, George flashed him a friendly smile as he approached, scratching Flick, who was standing by his side, behind her ears. The dog preened at the attention, moving closer and pushing her big, fluffy head into his hand. George couldn't help but smile at that.

Wordlessly, Harold started to amble in the direction of the kitchen; wordlessly, George followed. He gestured in the direction of the dinner table, slowly, carefully, lowering himself into the chair nearest to him in a very particular way that didn't make his dodgy hip ache, or so he'd tell anyone who gave it half a glance. George carefully sat opposite, cringing as the legs screeched against the floor as he pulled the chair out, disturbing the awkward silence that hung weighty in the kitchen.

Harold cleared his throat, pulling his lips into a slight smile. "I just wanted to say thank you, George," he said with a serious nod, "for taking such good care of Clay generally, but at the moment especially. Louise—his Grandmother—her passing hasn't been easy on him, but I can tell that you're helping him."

George let out a couple of stilted chuckles. They echoed around the kitchen, bouncing off the smooth stone tiles, the marbled surface tops, the window walls and patio doors. George cringed at how they seemed to have haunted him. "Oh—err, it's nothing, really! I know it must have been so hard for you all, you especially," he paused, his expression dropping to sympathetic sincerity, "I know you've probably heard it a thousand times today but I am so sorry for your loss."

"It's alright, son." Harold's lips quirked upwards, his voice softening, losing its normal bark, "honestly, Louise and I—we both knew it was coming. Of course I was sad to lose her, but it was the right time for her to go, and we were both prepared for it as well." his eyes pooled with liquid reminiscence, glinting in the light as they creased at the edges. "Don't tell this to Clay, but Louise... she was in a lot of pain when she passed." He sighed a hurt, recollecting sigh, one of futility and sorrow; a darker nostalgia than he'd been speaking with previously. "The cancer made her so sick that death was a mercy, and honestly... honestly it soothes my heart to know that she's no longer suffering." He smiled the same smile he'd seen earlier at the remembrance service, a smile that was making do with the situation, one of forced acceptance. A smile that no longer reached the eyes. "Sometimes if you love someone, you do the kindest thing for them. For her, it was letting her go when she did, rather than fighting it with all those machines."

His expression shifted—it was sentimental, more content once again. George much preferred this expression on him. "She would have killed us all if she woke up connected to all those machines, hardly living," he let out a snort of amusement, and George felt the corners of his lips upturn, "she told us herself that she wanted to go and when Louise makes her mind up on something, it ain't going to change, I can tell you that. But Clay was always such an optimist, though—you know how he is... he'd convinced himself that the treatment was going to work and that she was going to get

better so when... it inevitably happened, it hit him hard. He's a strong boy, but it's not been easy for him in particular."

George thought back to how small, how vulnerable, Dream had seemed the past two nights, raw with his confessions of grief that had struck him right to his core. His heart twinged with an aching pang of sympathy for the boy he loved so dearly. "I'm just glad I could be here to help him, you know?"

"It was a good idea to have you over for his birthday, it's made his summer, I think," Harold chuckled.

"Well, we have Sienna to thank for that; it *was* her idea, after all," George spoke amusedly, remembering how proudly Sarah had told him about it in the car journey over.

"I guess we do, don't we," Harold smiled.

George drew in a deep breath, preparing himself to speak further, deeper, really tearing his heart open for Harold to see. "It's nice to be here with him, in person." He said softly. Harold listened with a comforting look that almost felt laced with some sort of knowing, and George took it as a cue to continue. "Honestly, I was being a coward before- before Sarah reached out to me." He admitted, raw and honest, and he hadn't realised how this had all been weighing on him until the words had left him and all of a sudden he felt kilos lighter, like his lungs had been pumped full of helium and a fog cleared from his mind. "I was scared," he continued earnestly, "scared to make the jump, to go from knowing him online to meeting physically. I was scared that our relationship would change, or things would be awkward, or we wouldn't get along as well—which was all irrational, but I was being a coward, and I am so glad that Sarah asked me to come along to stay here with you... it was the push that I needed."

There was a momentary pause as the pair of them both took in George's divulgence, and George hadn't even realised he'd been holding his breath until Harold started to talk. "You needn't worry about that anymore, at least. It's clear that you and Clay, the two of you have something special. I'm sure you must have noticed that a while ago, how when you became friends it was different to how it was with different people—correct me if I'm wrong of course—but you felt a connection with him, did you not? A deep-rooted trust that was almost immediate, like you'd known each other all your lives and could talk for hours about the most meaningless things."

George nodded in agreement, eyes widening as he felt every word resonate with his feelings for Dream, platonic or otherwise.

“Now, I don’t believe in all that soulmate nonsense that the movies spew about there only being one person truly perfect for you but what I have found is that there are people who will inevitably be special to you. No matter how you meet them, whether your relationship is romantic, or platonic, or perhaps something in between, these people are special to you, and you are special to them.” He shifted, taking George’s hands, which were interlaced and resting on the table, into his. The skin was thick and leathery, calloused and dotted with blemishes and sunspots but undoubtedly grounding. “You and Clay, you mean a lot to each other. Don’t ever forget that, will you, George?”

George shook his head quickly, “I won’t.”

“It would be such a shame for what the pair of you have to be lost. You remind me of me and Louise when we were younger, you know?”

“We do?” George asked slowly, curiously, waiting for a tale, or a lesson or something else of the sort.

“You do,” was all Harold said in response, “you’ll understand when you’re older, I’m sure.”

George dipped his head when no more was said, reluctantly shifting out of his chair and taking a step away from the table.

“Oh, George, before you go!” Harold spoke quickly, halting George in his steps, “go up to the attic, will you? I sent Clay up there to have a look through all of Louise’s stuff and take anything he wants to keep, will you go and check on him? I reckon he could do with your company.”

*

The attic was one of the few places within the house that George hadn’t explored during the past six days. Dream had offhandedly pointed out the entrance during his grand tour on his arrival; a rather inconspicuous-looking wooden door right at the end of the corridor, painted the same shade of cream as the walls. He wasn’t particularly surprised to find it ajar.

“Dream?” He called out, mainly to alert Dream of his presence, although he noted that it hardly seemed necessary when every time he stood on another step, it painfully groaned under his weight without fail.

“George?” Dream’s response came back loud and clear and, as his head rose above the level of the planked floor, he spotted Dream. “Hi,” Dream forced a smile, (George could hear it in his voice as well as seeing it on his face—you become attuned to that sort of thing after so many years of voice calls) “what are you doing up here?”

“Your Granddad said you were up here,” George said from where he was awkwardly loitering at the entrance of the attic with a weak shrug. “I just wanted to come and see you.”

“Oh. Well here I am, guess you’ve seen me!” Dream weakly chuckled, though they sounded hollow and gaunt, emotionless and void. Quite like how he looked. George might have been stupidly head-over-heels attracted to Dream but even somebody deluded by their feelings could see that Dream looked worse for wear, to put it lightly. As George approached him, he could make out the puffy bags weighing down Dream’s lower lids, the veiny pink of the scleras of his eyes like a blood-fed flower, the tear-stained rose of his glossy cheeks, the trembling of petal-lips as he drew in one more wobbly breath.

“What are you reading?” George asked with curiosity, eyeing the large book that lay closed in Dream’s lap.

“It’s a photo album, actually,” Dream corrected him with a soft smile, both his words and expression an invitation for George to join him, “they’re most of the photos we have from when Grandma and Grandpa were younger.” George took a seat on a spot of dusty floor next to Dream. As Dream flicked through flimsy, photo-crammed pages of film he got comfortable, sidling up next to him, resting his chin on Dream’s shoulder.

“This one here was from when she’d just started elementary school.” Dream moved his index finger to a faded, monochrome photo. In it sat a little girl, her hair drawn back into two neat little plaits, her face stretched into a beaming grin, her back ruler-straight. “Granny said her parents had needed to bribe her with tootsie rolls-” George scrunched his nose in confusion, his eyebrows furrowed, and Dream just playfully rolled his eyes in response, “-they’re a candy—to make her keep still enough for the photo, or she’d have wriggled and made the photo all blurry. She was always like that, even until... until-”

“Yeah,” George gently cut him off, sensing that Dream really didn’t want to get to the end of that sentence. He placed a comforting hand on the top of Dream’s knee, waiting for him to continue.

“She could never just sit in an armchair and watch sport or read the papers like Grandpa does now, she said it would make her joints go all stiff and her brain lose its sharp.” Dream chuckled softly, eyes wide and stricken with the sweet familiarity, “We have stacks of wool blankets lying around; knitting and crochet were things she could do even when moving became more difficult for her.” George watched two tears drip onto the album in quick succession, forming little pools on the film,

distorting the photos below, but before he could even offer any solace, Dream continued to speak, blinking rapidly, “this one here, this was her side of the family. Apparently, I met my great-grandma and great-grandpa when I was a baby, but they died when I was really young, so I don’t remember them.” Dream gently turned the page, his expression contorting into a watery grin.

“This is one of my favourites—that one in the top left corner.” Dream brought his pointer finger up to trace the edges of the photo through the protective film as he talked, “it was their first date - Grandpa took Grandma to a dance. It was one of the best days of her life, that’s what she told me, and she still remembers it as though it happened yesterday—or, she did. She taught me how to dance, you know? She always told me that being able to dance gracefully like a proper gentleman would be the only way to show some respect to any girl I liked...” Dream laughed lightly as he remembered the thought with a fond smile, “I never got to actually dance with anyone, but I don’t think I appreciated in that moment quite how much I would treasure that afternoon...”

“That sounds sweet of her. Hopefully someday you’ll get to dance with a lucky girl or boy just for her!” George chuckled softly, before turning his attention back to the photograph. “Your Grandpa looked a lot like you do now.” George stated, reaching up to cup Dream’s cheek, gently applying pressure until Dream conceded and allowed himself to become malleable, letting George raise and tilt his head until they were merely inches apart. “You have the same jawline,” George said, running the back of his middle finger along the underside of Dream’s jaw in a gentle caress, his gaze flicking between Dream and the photo (and perhaps lingering on the former a little longer than necessary), “similar lips,” George moved his hand up, pressing against Dream’s lips with the pad of his thumb and willing himself not to think about how fucking soft they were, totally lax under his touch, “...you have a better haircut though,” he added with a giggle as he mentally compared Dream’s silky waves to young-Harold’s much shorter cut, shiny and slicked back.

“Of course I do!” Dream exclaimed as though he were offended, running a hand through his hair with a petulant look that quickly morphed into one of amusement.

“You have more of your Granny’s nose though, they both have that slight bump here...” George observed, slowly following the line of Dream’s nose with a finger. For a second, their gazes locked, bold and intense in a way that almost made him feel light-headed, but then, in the corner of his eye, he noticed something; “Look—is that the jacket he’s wearing?!”

“It might be!” Dream’s eyes lit up as he scrambled to stand, hurrying over to the other side of the attic, each floorboard creaking underfoot. The jacket he pulled out seemed to be identical; the same soft brown leather, albeit dustier than it appeared in the photo, and the sleeves were the same leather but green—a deep, luscious forest green that had managed to keep its colour through so many decades. Dream held it in his hands as though it were a treasure, an artefact, tracing the seams with a feather-light touch.

“You should try it on,” George said with a grin.

Dream rolled his eyes, “What?”

“Seriously!” George pushed, “try it on! I bet it would fit you!”

“Are you *sure* ?”

George snorted, “Your Grandpa doesn’t strike me as the sort of person who would want things to waste away in an attic.”

Dream simply shrugged in agreement, carefully unfolding the garment and sliding it on over the suit shirt that he’d been donning.

“I- uhh... wow, Dream.” George choked out. It fit him near-perfectly, if not marginally too small—but that only acted to accentuate the muscles of his biceps and hug the slight curve of his waist. The earthy green made his eyes shine brighter, deeper, like two perfect pieces of polished malachite, and the brown brought out the warm tan of his skin.

“It’s that bad?”

“No, no, no! It’s that *good* , I mean that shade of green is just-” George made vague gestures with his arms, trying to explain how fucking incredible it looked without confessing his undying love for the man.

“It’s...?”

“It looks good on you. That’s all.”

“Oh- thank you,” Dream flushed all red and hot, his cheeks a sweet scarlet, like the way strawberries stained skin, or ripe cherries’ juice that dripped from his lips to paint his throat and perhaps even lower.

George indulgently wondered just how far the blush travelled.

“So,” George cleared his throat awkwardly, desperate not to divulge all the praises he dreamt of Dream in that very moment, “have you found anything else you want to keep?”

“I have, actually!” Dream’s eyes lit up as he reached for one of the cardboard boxes stacked next to where they had been sitting, “this is my Grandma’s old record player! She used it a lot when we were younger: it used to sit on the windowsill in the kitchen and she’d use it as she cooked!”

“Does it still work?” George asked, marvelling at the gorgeous thing as Dream removed it from the confines of its packaging. He pulled out what, at first glance, seemed to be a brown briefcase, bright and rectangular, with a sleek black handle on the top. And then, Dream unfastened the clasps and the pandora’s box was finally open. “I don’t think I’ve ever actually seen a record player in real life before,” George admitted, pausing, before adding with a smile; “play me something!”

“Really?” Dream frowned dubiously, looking down at the machine with a protective look that held every ounce of fierce fondness that he possessed for it.

“I mean unless you think she’d prefer for it to gather dust on a shelf somewhere-”

Dream’s eyes widened, “no! Of course she wouldn’t!” he said quickly, the inner turmoil mirrored in his eyes.

“Then play something!” George laughed, carefully unwinding the thick black cord that was tangled at the side of it.

“I don’t know if it will work...”

“Well there’s no way of knowing unless we try!” George’s smile only widened when a little red light on the side of the record player flickered on. “Which record should we play then?”

Dream hummed in thought, flipping through a box stuffed full of record covers to the point that it was bulging at the seams, threatening to break with every sleeve that Dream cautiously pried from it.

“This one. We should play this one.” Dream announced softly, handing George a record. The sleeve was creased and faded, proudly bearing a photo of a woman in a beautiful white dress staring wistfully into the distance. The title was written in bright neon angular capitals, announcing the best hits of some old singer whose name George did not recognise. “It was my granny’s favourite. She adored Ruby Murray—she was convinced that none of the singers popular now had a voice that could even compare to her’s.” Dream chuckled reminiscently at the thought. “*Softly, Softly* was her favourite of all Ruby Murray’s songs. Whenever I couldn’t—” Dream cut himself off with a sniffle, his voice wobbling dangerously. “Whenever I had nightmares or couldn’t sleep, she’d sing it to me and hug me until I fell asleep.”

George carefully placed the record player on top of a sealed cardboard box before wrapping Dream in a tight embrace, burying his face into the crook of Dream’s collarbone.

“Shh,” he cooed gently, rubbing circles into the small of Dream’s back, “don’t cry, you idiot! Wouldn’t she be so happy to know that you were listening to her favourite record?”

“I think she would be,” Dream’s barely-there voice cracked as he nodded into George’s hair. The pair of them rocked back and forwards, wrapped up in each other for only a few seconds that dragged out into what could have been hours. The embrace was filled with all the words left unsaid, with the lingering nostalgia of decades of memories that were stored in the cardboard boxes surrounding them.

George held him until the slight tremble that had been shaking his body subsided and his breaths slowed, and, as a poor attempt at a distraction, he asked, “So how do we play the song, then?” as he pulled away, speaking softly, tentatively, as though he were approaching some sort of skittish animal. One hand gently gripped Dream’s forearm, the other placing the record down next to the record player.

“Look,” Dream started with a breathy giggle as George inspectingly twiddled with the knobs and pushed the buttons, frowning when nothing ended up doing anything, “let me do it.”

George watched with curiosity as Dream twisted the dials until he was happy with each, pressing a couple of buttons and then finally, delicately, he removed the record from its sleeve. Once he’d placed it on the player, he moved the needle, setting it down right on the smooth, glossy edge of the record, where the black vinyl was not striped with what George presumed would cause the songs.

With one final click of a button, the record player started to whirr and spin and, just moments later, a harp’s glorious arpeggio rang clear through the record player, an angelic chorus singing in perfect harmony sounding short after.

All of a sudden, it felt as though the stuffy, dusty attic had been transformed into some sort of idyll, as though the roof had been lifted and replaced with a portal to some seraphic haven just for the two of them. He could have sworn if he had looked up he would have been able to see galaxies of stars not visible to even the most powerful telescope, realms of stars and planets shimmering and sparkling as the mirage solidified, and all drawn in by the inescapable wonder, the unavoidable gravitational pull of Dream as the centre of *his* universe.

“George, may I have this dance?” He asked over the introduction, dramatically taking George’s hand in his and pressing a chaste kiss to his knuckles. The lighting of the attic cast shadows over Dream’s face, which glistened in the last shreds of the afternoon sun and yet his splendour was blinding. Though the Earth’s sun was setting, George’s sun only rose in intensity, hot beams of energy coursing through his veins, radiating in his greatness.

“*Dance ?*” George’s eyes widened.

“Yeah, dance with me, George!” Dream laughed, dragging him into the centre of their chosen dancefloor.

George frowned, “But I don’t know how-”

“That’s why I’m leading, silly!” Dream exclaimed, with a knowing grin, “Look, just...”

He pulled George closer, wrapping one arm around his waist, the other tightening in George’s grasp. He was acutely aware of every point of contact, and wondered if Dream could feel the blood coursing through his speeding veins and arteries which strained to keep up with the thundering of his racing heart.

“*Softly, softly,*” Dream sang under his breath, taking a step back, one which George mirrored with a tentative step forward, drawing a smile of encouragement from Dream’s lips, “*come to me,*” this time, Dream stepped forwards and for a moment George’s mind froze as he came closer. It took their noses bumping dragging him out of his pious daze, taking a stumbling step back, one which was stabilised by Dream’s ready arms, “*touch my lips so tenderly,*” Dream’s voice was truly seraphic, so soft, slightly raspy in a way that was just so delicious that made him want to lean in, to close the distance and swallow each word that fell from his blessed lips. “*Softly, softly turn the key,*” Dream brought his foot in so that they were together once more. George quickly copied the movement, “*and open up my heart,*”

To his surprise, George found himself quickly becoming accustomed to Dream's movements. Sure, his steps were heavier, his back crooked, his feet scuffing the ground and lacking all the grace that Dream possessed but he couldn't bring himself to care.

With each step they took, his vision focused further in on Dream, the surroundings melting away. It was impossible to tell whether there were creaking, splintering floorboards beneath his feet or luscious grass on some mountain of eternal opulence, whether it was the record player or spirits singing the paradisiacal melody, whether the walls were peeling paint or vast sapphire seas that glinted and winked with millennia of ancient secrets, whether there was a roof above them or their own personal cosmos.

And yet this luscious scenery was on the back burner of his mind, buried deep under the one thing that wholly consumed him; Dream.

He could see miles of mossy forest buried deep into his eyes, the stars above them reflected in formations of freckles dotting his cheeks, the sun shining brightly from his aureate hair, the angelic chorus, background to his singing. Dream was all he needed, Dream was *everything* to him and he knew he was falling too deep—hell—he knew he'd fallen too deep days ago but it felt so good to be swept up in Dream's arms like he actually loved him.

“ softly, softly turn the key ,” Dream sang along, and as the song slowed to a close, their dancing did too, *“ and open up my heart. ”*

They were close, *so* close, Dream snaking his arms from where they'd been resting—one on George's shoulder, one interlaced with his—to loosely hang around his waist and the centimetres between them dropped to single digits.

For a moment, they stayed like that; catching their breath from the dancing, gazes locked, the air thick and heavy between them.

“Thank you for that,” Dream murmured. George could feel the words brush his cheeks, almost feel the vibrations in his chest. His heart clenched painfully.

“You should have saved it for someone special,” George chuckled awkwardly, torn between enjoying this splendour for just a moment more or drawing back—the right thing to do, he suspected, “I'm sure that's what your Granny would have wanted.”

Dream's eyebrows raised, “*you are* someone special, George,” Dream raised a hand to cup

George's cheek, caress the soft skin there. George didn't think it was possible but somehow, his heart sped up, racing away. He felt dizzy, giddy from the proximity with Dream and the affection afflicted unto him and the dancing and he wasn't entirely sure that he hadn't just died and gone to heaven when he could taste the smell of Dream's shampoo and his cologne on the back of his throat with every breath. "I think she'd have been happy with this."

He almost thought Dream was going to move away for a moment but instead, he only moved closer, slotting one leg between George's and moving the other hand up to rest behind his neck.

"There's no one around, Dream," George sighed onto Dream's lips, his eyes wide with shock, with guilt, with *lust*. There was nothing to show, nothing to prove to anyone, just the pair of them, and whatever song the record player had moved on to next, and George's hand-crafted utopia. Yet still, Dream remained,

"Does there need to be?" Dream said, and before George even had a chance to think about those five words, Dream's lips were on his.

They were soft, so soft, as they moved as languid as the path of time around them. He closed his eyes, focusing on the feelings of Dream consuming him; how George felt entirely wrapped up in him, how Dream's lips *tasted* on his. It was slow and gentle and warm—there were no fireworks, no little sparks at each point of contact but *God* was there warmth, liquid gold seeping through their skin and corrupting their blood. The idyll had transformed from ultimate serenity to brilliant flames roaring with the passion that flowed through him, licking at their legs with every feeling that they'd left unsaid. Fiery temptation heated his brain, smouldering all the guilt, all the shame and transforming it to want, hot, selfish want. George took, and he took, but Dream took too, his lips moving just as fervently as George's, his hands lacing tight through chestnut waves in a way that made George let out an involuntary groan.

"Fuck," Dream gasped into the kiss, pulling George tighter, only to release his grip, his arms hanging limp at his sides. "*Fuck*," Dream repeated louder as he pulled away, his eyes wide, shellshocked, and when George opened his he caught a flash of gold and green and the slam of the door, left with an empty attic to consider what the hell just happened to the abandoned tune of Ruby Murray.

Chapter End Notes

fun fact I almost named the fic softly, softly
anyways, the fact that this was ready on a Thursday is a funny coincidence and most definitely not planned. i expect c7 will not be out by next Thursday unfortunately but I'll try and have it done in two weeks maybe?
i hope you are all doing well!
artio :D

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

i am so so sorry for making you wait for so long but here it is; the long-awaited finale!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Almost immediately, it seemed as though the air had become thicker, laden with mourning and topped off by the tension the two of them had brought upon themselves. The whole family sat down for a meal (a delicious roast - a shame, George thought, that he couldn't have enjoyed it quite as much as it deserved, given the circumstances) which was eaten in an awkward sort of quiet, filled with the scratching of crockery against their finest china, soft chatter between Sienna, Sarah, and Mark on one end of the table, whilst Dream and George sat in silence.

Such awkwardness permeated throughout the afternoon, the two of them dancing around each other, desperate for avoidance only to be forced together once more in ways that George didn't think could get any worse, until he was mistaken when Dream's mother herself approached them, frogmarching the two of them away from the family. The kitchen settled into an apprehensive silence, so strained it was practically visible in the air among the specs of flour still suspended in the honeyed air of the late afternoon as the pair of them cowered under Sarah's scrutiny.

"Alright," She furrowed her grey-speckled brows, wielding a wooden spoon coated with melted dark chocolate in their general direction, "what is going on between you two?"

Dream chuckled awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck as his gaze flitted around the room, settling on everything that wasn't his mother, "What do you mean? Nothing's going on between us!"

"Yeah," George added, his voice catching in his throat and cracking as it escaped through gritted teeth.

Sarah let out a long, drawn-out sigh, paired with a look of thick disapproval, "My eyesight may be worsening but I'm not blind! I saw how the two of you acted earlier, and I can see how you're acting now: I know tension when I see it. You only have one more day together and I will not just stand by and let you ruin it over whatever petty argument you've had."

"We haven't argued-" Dream mumbled, but he was quickly interrupted with a firm. " *Clayton.* "

Dream immediately halted in what he was saying, mouth firmly shut, eyes wide. George didn't think he'd ever seen him shut up so fast, but he'd be lying if he thought he'd react in a different way to Dream.

Sarah was rather scary when she was giving orders.

"The two of you are going to go into the lounge, and you're not coming out until you've made up, alright?"

"But mom-"

" *Alright?*"

"Okay." Dream practically whispered.

George offered her the best smile he could muster as he shuffled past her.

Needless to say, it was not returned.

*

"So," Dream huffed, eyes glued to the ground.

"So." George responded, offering him the best smile he could muster, which ended up being barely more than a quirk of his lips. The pair sat at opposite ends of the sofa, stilted and stiff, backs straight, bodies facing forward. It was practically a caricature of a forced confrontation; perhaps if anyone else was there they might have found it amusing.

But Dream and George were alone with the painful silence only interrupted by the periodic ticking of the grandfather clock that stood proud in the corner, each seemingly getting further and further

apart as the seconds sluggishly dragged on.

Dream stifled a yawn, rubbing circles into his temples as he muttered, "God this is so dumb. It's not like we hate each other or anything."

George just hummed in agreement, picking at the loose hem of his sleeve: one of Dream's hoodies that he'd managed to adopt over the course of the week purely because he hadn't brought enough and certainly not because they made him feel all warm and safe. It was, ironically, his own merchandise: the grey hoodie with his iconic knock-off supreme logo in the middle of the chest, but it was naturally a couple of sizes larger than he would usually get, and so soft from many washes in the past. He'd claimed it the moment he'd seen it (it did quite literally have his name on it, after all), and Dream, surprisingly, did not protest. Sure, it felt a little awkward wearing his hoodie but he wasn't going to let himself prioritise whatever was going on between them over his comfort, and without it he would be oh so cold in the mild, humid, Virginia evening.

And so the hoodie remained.

"Why don't we just stay in here for a bit, watch some TV or something and hope she lays off us when we leave." Dream offered, staring at the side-table next to George rather pointedly until he let out a little, awkward "oh!", hastily grabbing the remote that was sitting there and fumbling with the buttons until the TV flashed to life.

"What do you want to watch?" George asked, chucking the remote in Dream's direction, watching it arc through the air and land at least a foot in front of the sofa, clattering against the hardwood floor where the rug didn't quite reach.

"I don't mind," Dream shrugged, folding awkwardly in half to pick it up.

"You can choose."

"Fine, how about..." Dream sighed, not looking away from the TV as he flicked through channel after channel after channel before settling on something that seemed to be showing movies, "*Star Wars* ?"

Pulling a pillow into his lap to hug, George shrugged, resting his chin on the top of the plush, velvety fabric. "I've never seen any of them before but sure."

As swelling music seeped through the speakers and the screen flashed up with some dusty planet somewhere, George lost himself to his mind. The dramatic dialogue became background chatter, practically white noise to his inner thoughts. Occasionally he would bring himself back to the present, to where he was sitting on a squishy sofa, legs tucked under him, hands resting on the pillow that had remained in his lap, pretending that he was alone. Unsurprisingly, whatever was going on on the screen seemed to make less sense every time.

One particular instance of his periodic awareness, he could feel a familiar shiver stuck where his head met his spine, a warmth flushing through the back of his neck, prickling sending waves of goosebumps over his bare arms; the feeling of being watched. When he glanced to the left, just for a second, he snagged on a certain emerald gaze, though it was quickly dragged away as his eyes averted to settle in his lap, fixed on his fidgeting fingers.

“Are-” George started, though it hardly came out as more than a croak. Under the burning scrutiny of Dream’s curious gaze, he cleared his throat, swallowing once, twice, before trying one more time, “Are you... okay?”

Dream forced his lips to curve upwards, though it didn’t make much of a smile, “Oh, no- I mean yeah!” He chuckled awkwardly, before weakly tacking on, “Are you enjoying it?”

Glancing to the TV, George muttered, “I’m not going to lie, I’ve got no clue what’s going on.”

“Yeah, me neither,” Dream chuckled.

And then an aching familiar quiet fell upon the room again, the TV no longer enough to fill the void of sound.

Now that whatever barrier had broken between them, George couldn’t stand the state that the room was left in. No more could he dig deep into his thoughts and lose himself in them. His eyes couldn’t settle, darting across the room everywhere but Dream, his fingers twitching and fidgeting, cracking each knuckle left to right, then right to left, then all at once. His thoughts swelled, growing in size, in number, each getting bigger and bolder, consuming his brain until it was too much. He couldn’t take it anymore.

"Dream," George asked softly, hesitantly, watching the blond out of the corner of his eye.

"Yeah?"

Reluctantly, he shifted to face Dream, sucking in a harsh breath through tightly clenched teeth.

“Could I ask you something?”

When Dream gave a reluctant nod, George continued, “Why did you... why me?”

"What do you mean?" Dream's brows furrowed, his trepidation melting into what seemed to George to look like genuine confusion.

"Why did you choose me... to be your boyfriend, I mean"

Dream paused for a moment, before finally admitting, "I... I'm not sure."

“Surely there was a reason, wasn't there? Even if it was literally that we're best friends and you know me so well.”

“I guess there's that.” Dream muttered, and George let out a dry chuckle in response.

“So that's it, then? You lied about dating because—what—because we're such close friends?”

Bashfully, Dream tensely bobbed his head, a tiny movement that you would have missed if you'd blinked. Fortunately, George hadn't and thus he continued, "But you have so many other close friends who- who weren't gonna move in, you *knew* I was moving in, I just- I don't understand why it wouldn't have been easier to pick someone else, like- like Karl or Quackity, they're not moving in with you, right?”

“Yeah, probably” Dream forced out, nodding weakly once again.

“But you're Dream!” George exclaimed, throwing his hands up in exasperation, “You think everything, like, five times through! There's no way you would have made such a stupid mistake... especially seeing as I've spoken to your family before as well! They know me!”

“I know, I- I... I know.”

“Maybe you could have gone with someone like Punz or Bad, they’re not even coming over here any time soon, right? At least if you said Callahan, then they wouldn’t even have been able to ask to speak to him,” George chuckled drily.

“True,” Dream laughed shakily

“So why didn’t you pick one of them, then, Dream? Did you really just forget that I was going to move in, or do you not feel close enough to them? Was it that you knew I’d lie for you, even when I came, was that it?”

“No, of course not!”

“Then why me, Dream? Why not literally anyone else!”

“Because none of them are you!”

“What does that even *mean* ?!” George cried out, his eyes pricking with tears as everything that had been building in him finally overflowed.

With a deep breath, in and out, Dream spoke with a wobbly voice, “For me, it’s you, George! It’s always been you! When I panicked and lied, you were the first one that came to mind—you were the *only* one to come to mind. You’ve seen how close I am to my family—do you think that they would have believed me, that they wouldn’t have caught me out yet? Half the shit I said wasn’t even lying! I just- I... fuck- I- I love you George, okay!” Dream was shaking now, the exertion of such an outburst that he felt in all his being lit the nerves all through his body, from his racing heart to the trembling fingertips that didn’t quite know where to settle. George watched as fat tears turned smooth cheeks crystalline, trailing down their glossy paths. “I love you so much I don’t think I would even be able to pretend to date someone else. I couldn’t even lie about dating anyone else because I’ve been obsessing over you for the past *three* years! And I’m so sorry that I’ve been creeping on you and I get that I’m weird and gross and- and I’ll find you somewhere else to sleep, I could get you a hotel room for the night if you wanted or I- I-”

“Breathe, Dream, breathe,” George spoke slowly, taking one of Dream’s hands and rubbing soothing circles into the palm of it, before placing it on his own chest, his own hand lacing around it. “There you go, nice and deep just like mine, just like that. What are you crying about, huh?”

“Today has been *so much*,” He sniffled, pausing to force in a couple of deep breaths, “and now I’ve fucked stuff up between us as well and you’re gonna leave and-

George frowned, though it was laced with amusement as he chuckled softly, “Who said anything about me leaving?”

Weakly, Dream wrenched his hand back, cradling it into himself protectively. “Well, if you don’t leave then it’s gonna be so awkward-”

“Just- just stop for a moment, okay? Let me speak.”

Dream nodded rapidly, rubbing harsh palms into his eyes, catching the stray tears on his sweater sleeve, his breath hitching as he braced himself in anticipation.

“I love you too, Dream.” George finally spoke, slowly and with the most assurance that he could muster. It was a simple confession; no dramatics, no foreplanning, no balloons or roses or big red bows on the top, just five words; five simple words that took the entirety of his fragile heart out, vulnerable, ripped raw from his chest for Dream to take, to wield, to do his bidding with.

For a moment, there was silence.

All the tension in Dream’s face dropped, for a moment. Then his eyes widened, eyebrows flying up, jaw lax and mouth gaping. “You- wait, you- *what* ?!”

“I love you too. I’ve loved you for a really long time as well—God, we’re useless, aren’t we!” George sighed, punctuated with a little huffed laugh, “I don’t remember when I fell in love with you, or why, or whatever, but I promise you, I feel the same, I always have.”

And with that, George collapsed into Dream, clinging to him so tightly that he was sure his fists must have gone white, his arms already aching but neither of them could bring themselves to care as they bathed in the comfort the other brought. It could have been seconds or hours when they finally drew back for a moment, still tightly wound together but enough for George to meet his eyes, to return the wobbly smile that Dream was offering.

“Can I kiss you?” George whispered, reaching up to hold Dream’s face in his hands so gently, as

though Dream would shatter if he placed a finger wrong. He traced lazy circles and languid lines with the pads of his thumbs like he was attempting to connect each of the freckles that dusted Dream's cheeks, bless each one with a doting touch.

No more words were to be said, it seemed, nor any sort of response warranted aside from the connecting of their lips softly, cautiously, daringly. They kissed sweetly, telling the other every word they hadn't spoken through the way they stayed so close, every movement saturated with love and tenderness, syrupy and warm. It was everything they could have wanted, everything that they needed after what had happened, and they revelled in it.

"You're not gonna run away this time, are you?" George muttered amusedly against Dream's lips as they pulled back for air. Dream's face was glimmering once more in the last few golden sunbeams that snuck over the horizon but George knew that this time he needn't worry for the reason. Without a word, he brushed them away.

With a wet chuckle, Dream firmly said, "no. Not this time. Never again."

"Is that why you ran away earlier? 'Cus you thought you were..."

"I thought I was forcing myself on you," Dream admitted quietly, "and that I was going to make you uncomfortable, and scare you away and—"

"And that's why I kissed you back, isn't it?" George rolled his eyes, pressing a kiss to the tip of Dream's nose, then his forehead, and finally, his lips.

"You don't need to rub it in," Dream grumbled, before chasing the kisses, leaning further and further forward as George mirrored his actions teasingly, before finally, *finally*, meeting him for a chaste moment of contact.

"Well, it's a good thing we got our shit together," George snorted, "cause I was feeling most of the same stuff as you,"

When Dream pulled back for a second, his face furrowed quizzically, George continued, "I felt like I was taking advantage of the situation... indulging in some- some disgusting fantasy of you being my boyfriend when to you it was just an act—a lie that had gotten out of hand or something."

“You did?”

George chuckled softly, “I was worried sick about it! I felt so bad.”

“I’m glad we finally sorted it all out, though, 'cause now I can do this,” Dream met George’s plump, kiss-swollen lips once more, then again, then once more.

George hummed in agreement, “I guess that is pretty nice, isn’t it,”

“Sorry for crying on you again,” Dream said humorously, pulling back only to envelop George in an emotional embrace, “God, I’ve cried more in the past few days than I have in the past year, what a baby-”

“Hey, don’t talk about yourself like that!” George scolded him, the words muffled by Dream’s sweatshirt, “you’ve had a tricky time, you’re allowed to cry, and the only baby you are is *my* baby.”

And with that, Dream let out one of the wheezes he had become so famous for, their hug shaking with each chuckle, “George! That is the cheesiest thing-” his words were broken by yet another wheeze, “I have ever heard!”

“Okay, maybe it sounded a little better in my head,” George grumbled to himself, frowning into his lap.

With a little breathy chuckle, Dream gently placed his thumb under George’s chin, lifting it until their gazes met once more. “Stop pouting, maybe I like being your baby.”

“Fine,” George rolled his eyes, but leaned into Dream’s hand, “c’mon, we should probably go and let your Mum know we’re alright so she can stop worrying.”

*

Unsurprisingly, after their heartfelt divulgence, they remained joined at the hip for the rest of the

evening. Despite the air of solemnity and grievance, there was still the same overwhelming sense of family between the members of the household that there had been throughout the day, everyone keeping close together as though they were scared to be lonely, afraid they would lose another if they left the sight of another. And so, once again George had been forced into a family movie.

Honestly, he felt a little like he was intruding something incredibly personal, seeing everyone so raw, so emotional, and especially after he had lied to them all for the past week, but the events of the day were quickly catching up to him, so he let himself doze off in Dream's lap while *10 Things I Hate About You* played on in the background.

When they'd finally been allowed to retreat to the safety of Dream's bedroom, he was tackled onto the bed, caged in thick arms which rapidly darted to his sides, tickling up and down.

"Let me go, Dream!" George screamed as he writhed and squirmed in Dream's tightening grip, unable to escape the relentless torment he was being subjected to.

"No !" Dream wheezed, pausing the tickling to squeeze him even tighter.

"I need to go and have a shower!" George panted as he caught his breath back, finally breaking free of Dream's hold.

Dream snorted, chuckling unabashedly, although his words were still slurring with sleepiness, "Good. You stink."

"You're so dumb," George rolled his eyes. "Anyway, I was going to ask whether you wanted to come and shower with me."

Dream's expression dropped, his face instantly flushing a furious red. "Oh, uhh George- I dunno about—"

George waved his arms frantically, his eyes wide in horror, "God, no! Not like that! Not in that way! I just meant... I could wash your hair or something, maybe? It's what my ex used to do for me when I was really emotional or stressed about exams or something and—I dunno," he smiled bashfully, "I just thought it might be nice."

"Yeah. Actually that- uhh- that sounds good—that sounds nice." Dream offered George a soft smile from where he had remained, sprawled out on the bed on top of the covers.

“Cool. Okay.”

And so they made their way to the bathroom, George in the front, Dream not far behind. They undressed in silence, eyes pointedly looking everywhere but the other.

Neither of them made a move to remove their underwear.

The feeling of wet boxers clinging to his skin wasn't exactly comfortable—George had to stop himself grimacing at the sensation when he stepped into the cloud of steam and under the flow of water, but Dream didn't comment on it, so neither did he.

“You're gonna have to sit down, I think,” George spoke softly, the words fading into the steady crashing of the shower.

Dream grinned, amused. “‘Cus you're too short?”

“Because *you're* too tall,” He deadpanned, reaching his hands up to rest on Dream's shoulders in order to tug them down. In another situation, he might have dwelled upon the firm muscles of his back, the warm, water-slicked skin beneath his grip.

Currently, all he could focus on was the way that Dream just crumbled under the weak force he used, collapsing onto his knees with a loud thud that surely must have left a bruise.

Dream gazed up at him with half-lidded eyes and a dazed smile.

In another situation, he might have considered how *that* could have seemed.

But for now, he just sat down with perhaps a little more grace than Dream, sitting on his heels and reaching for the shampoo bottle nestled in a basket in the corner.

“You don't use two-in-one?” George snorted as he squirted some of it into the centre of his palm. It didn't smell too strongly, just vaguely clean in a way he couldn't quite put his finger on, aside from the scent of Dream's hair, of course.

“I just use whatever Mom buys,” Dream shrugged, slumping back against George’s chest.

“I bet the fans think that you use two-in-one.”

Dream tilted his head back until he could just about see George at the very top of his field of vision, “Do you think that I should?” he grinned mischievously.

“Nope,” George said, using his empty hand to tilt Dream’s head forward, “I bet it’s why your hair is so soft.”

“You think my hair is soft?” Once more, Dream attempted to turn to face George, but this time it was anticipated.

George drew out a dramatic groan, “It’s an objective comment! Anyone could tell that your hair is soft, you idiot!”

“I don’t want anyone to notice that my hair is soft. Only you.”

“Good.”

Dream hummed in pleasure, “That feels nice,”

“Does it?”

Dream nodded.

“Come on, get back under the water before you get any of the suds in your eyes.”

That night, Dream didn't even have to ask for George to hold him close as they fell asleep.

*

There was a shift in the air the next morning

Not like the day before, when it was tight, wrought with tension antagonising the shiftless grief that weighed on minds. Even when it tinted rose, a flash of amorous colour through muted grey, it was nothing quite like the air on this morning. There was a certain buzz, a sort of electricity; nervous, anticipatory, that charged the atmosphere like a cloud saturated with static, poised to unleash its thunderous strike. It was almost as though it knew that today was George's flight.

Dream woke them a little earlier than usual (because there was no way that George would force himself up unless he really had to, of course), and started to fold and pack George's possessions while he sleepily directed him from where he remained lounging on the bed.

When the grumbles of empty stomachs grew so loud and so frequent that ignoring them was becoming difficult, the pair of them headed downstairs.

"Morning," Dream stifled a yawn as he padded into the kitchen, George close behind. The morning was soft, soothing, nebulous morning rays pouring through the windows, molten amber flecked with floating dust. Time-worn cotton covered sleep-aches limbs, their minds still miry from the last wisps of fleeting dreams, perhaps George's more so as he let Dream lead him to the table by their locked fingers, dopily stumbling in the direction he was dragged in before flopping into his lap clumsily with a tired groan, burying his face into the soft, freckled skin of Dream's neck.

"So I take it you two made up, then?" Sienna snickered from somewhere on the other side of the kitchen as the sound of cereal clinking into ceramic filled the room.

Dream huffed, "We were never fighting! How many times do we have to tell everyone!"

"*Sure*," George could hear the way Sienna rolled her eyes in the sarcasm curling thick around the words, "because *that's* why y'all-"

“Sienna,” George mumbled amusedly into Dream’s collarbone, “we just had some stuff to talk through, alright?”

“If you *say* so,” she sighed.

The general clattering and clanging of her clumsily sorting through the cutlery drawer, followed by a muffled “*shit!*” and some silverware meeting the stone tiles of the floor with a satisfying thunk made George smile against his skin, losing himself to the vibration of Dream’s voice as he said, “You sound like Mom,”

Sienna sniffed in defiance, “I do not!”

“Yes, you do!” George could practically picture the shit-eating grin painted across Dream’s face, “Maddie, doesn’t she sound like Mom?”

Madison chuckled from across the kitchen table somewhere, “Yeah, kinda!”

“Exactly! George, doesn’t she sound like my mom?”

With a lazy hum, George untucked himself from Dream, shifting back to look up at him. “Whatever you say, Dream,” He shrugged with a humorous roll of his eyes, giving him a quick peck before snuggling back into Dream’s warmth, enveloped by the morning sunlight.

“You’re supposed to back me up!” Dream grumbled, and George just chuckled softly, feeling the weight of his eyelids increase by the second, the pull of sleep only growing.

George felt a kiss be laid gently to the mess of his bedhead.

“You can’t go back to sleep, you idiot! Come on, get up, I want some food.”

George let out a tired groan, whining childishly; “Do I have to?”

“Yes!” Dream laughed.

“*Fine*,” George dragged out the word, exaggerating stretching his arms before pressing one final kiss to Dream’s nose and heaving himself up. He couldn’t tell if he really was oblivious to the unspoken words hanging over their heads as they made small talk over cereal or if he was just too tired to care, but the moment Madison had shut the door behind her, it was as though a switch had flipped. Sienna’s eyes were flaming with intensity, her brows furrowed, lips wrought into a tense smirk.

“So.”

Dream frowned amusedly, parroting a mocking, “*So* .” right back at her, with a poor imitation of her voice and everything.

“Don’t make fun of me, *Clayton* .” Sienna snorted sarcastically, leaning over the table. “George is going today, and y’all are acting weirder than ever so I’ve gotta ask you something because Sappnap won’t stop messing with me.”

“Fine then, shoot.” Dream

“Are you two—y’know—actually, like, together?”

“Wh- I’m sorry- what?!” Dream spluttered, “What do you mean are we together—of course we’re together, why wouldn’t we be actually together?”

“You two have been acting strange all week! Like, seriously!” She exclaimed, waving her hands around dramatically before her tone changed, her voice much lower, more honest, “I’m not gonna snitch on you to Mom or something, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Dream and I are actually together,” George snickered, “look!”

He kept his eyes trained on Dream’s, the eye contact unwavering as he leaned in slowly, each second, the air getting thicker between them. A gentle hand came to rest on Dream’s cheek, and George couldn’t help but take note of how pretty Dream looked as his eyes fluttered shut in

anticipation, those long, black eyelashes moving to hide the green of a thousand forests. He hovered there for a moment, really enjoying the moment, before he lent just an inch closer, and then proceeded to lick Dream's nose, before breaking out into mischievous giggles.

"George!" Dream yelled, harshly rubbing the tip of his nose with the back of his hand, "That's disgusting!"

Wordlessly, George pressed an actual kiss to Dream's lip this time, before turning to Sienna expectantly.

"Okay, okay, I believe you, y'all can save all that," she waves in their direction, looking disgusted, "for when I've gone. I can't believe it," she grumbles.

"What was Sap even saying to you?" Dream asked curiously.

Sienna tilted her chin up indignantly, "He wouldn't give me an answer about what was going on with the pair of you! Every time I'd ask, he'd give me some bullshit about how I needed to find out for myself, or that I should know because I'm here with y'all and that you *might* be together or you might *not* be together so I just want a straight answer."

George snorted in amusement, "In his defence, I'm not sure if he really knew what was happening between us either-"

"So stuff *was* happening between you then?" She gasped, eyes wide with excitement.

George chuckled lightly, "Ok- well basically..." he started, though he couldn't quite find the words, and Dream continued where he had trailed off.

"George and I weren't, like, dating... not at the start of the week."

"Now we are for real, though!" George grinned, reaching for Dream's hand and interlacing their fingers, resting them on the table, a proclamation for all to see.

"I knew it!" Sienna shrieked, quite literally jumping out of her chair, "Goddamnit, I knew it!"

Doesn't matter, I owe Sapnap twenty bucks- y'all were faking it!"

Dream frowned, "Wait, hang on, why were there two of you making bets on-"

Sienna giggled manically, running towards the door and almost slipping flat on her face in the process, "I've gotta go call Sap, bye!"

When the whirlwind that was Sienna finally left the room with the slam of the kitchen door, Dream turned to George and sighed, "God, I can't believe her!"

"And Sapnap as well!" George snickered, "Of *course* he was riling her up like that."

"George?" Dream spoke curiously, far softer than before, and when George hummed questioningly in response, squeezing his hand, Dream continued slowly, "We are—like—actually together now, right?"

"Yeah, you idiot," George said with a content smile, resting his head on Dream's shoulder, "I thought we established that yesterday."

"No, I know, but what are we? Are we dating? Are we just-just something slightly more than friends? Are we *boyfriends*?"

"Dream," George stifled a chuckle, turning to face him, taking the other hand in his, then putting on his best expression of faux-dramatism, "will you officially do the honours of being my boyfriend."

Dream raised his eyebrows dubiously, but responded with humouring conviction, "Yes, George, I will do the honours of being your boyfriend."

George let out a little cheerful whoop "Let's go!" he giggled, collapsing into Dream, who closed his arms around him instinctually.

"You are so dumb!" Dream muttered under his breath.

“Now, you need to do the official boyfriend duty of helping me pack up my stuff.”

“Really?”

“Yes!”

“You’re *so* lucky I love you!”

*

Though George groaned and grumbled incessantly, packing went far quicker than he would have liked, and then the car drive to the airport slipped away in a flash of quick wit and shocking jokes from the entirety of Dream’s family, all squeezed into their minivan with all his luggage as well. It was only as he stood at the entrance, faced with the mismatched cut-and-paste blondes that he had come to love so dearly over the week that it hit him, though, and it wasn’t helped by the sad-eyed look of acknowledgement Dream gave him as George’s grip on his hand started to border on bruising.

For a moment, there was silence. Nobody knew what to say, or how to say it, because everyone knew that it would be the start to an end, the finale, so to speak.

“We sure are gonna miss you, George, that’s for sure.” Sarah started, “You have been the most wonderful guest, you must come and visit us again soon!”

“Thank you for having me, Sarah, I’ve had a wonderful time.” George smiled genuinely, before being shoed into her arms, and he hugged her back just as tightly.

“Thanks for coming, George. I can’t tell you how happy you’ve made him.” She whispered under her breath, soft enough that he was sure only the two of them could hear.

“That’s all I ever wanted to do,” George muttered honestly as they pulled back, and she grinned tearfully as she ruffled his hair, before stepping out the way.

Maddie gave him a quick hug and well wishes, Mark shook his hand firmly, and then Dylan approached.

Awkwardly, he stood in front of George, unsurprisingly, adverse to any sort of physical affection. For a moment, George could see him scrambling for the right words, his eyes shifting, his mouth opening, then closing, then opening once more, finally settling on; "I'm sorry for being such a dick to you."

George let out a sigh, "It's okay-"

"No, it's not okay. I was a massive dick to you and I took out my own problems on you and- and that is not okay, so I'm sorry."

"Alright." George offered him a soft smile, one which Dylan swiftly mirrored.

"Thank you for taking it all through with me as well. I really needed to hear that."

"No problem," George said, patting him on the shoulder a couple of times (which ended up being a little bit clumsy, seeing as Dylan towered over him, but neither of them even acknowledged it), "It's only what I would have wanted to hear when I was your age. If you ever need to talk again, get my number off of Dream or something, seriously."

"Thank you," Dylan repeated finally, before letting Sienna take his place, barreling into him and squeezing him so tightly that he could have sworn his stomach started to make its way up his throat.

"I'm gonna miss you so much!" She mumbled into the hug, wrapping her arms even tighter around him (as if it was even possible) before finally letting go. "Can't we keep George and send Clay back to England?" She snorted, loud enough for the rest of them to hear, but before any protests could be sounded, she quickly declared it a joke.

("I wasn't joking." She whispered, deadpanned, to George, before she backed away. George could barely suppress his laughter)

And then finally, there stood Dream, right where he had met Sarah on the day he had arrived.

Unlike with everyone else, George spoke first this time.

“I want to move in with you and Sapnap.” He said softly, just opening his shaking arms for Dream to collapse into.

“You do?” Dream asked into George’s hair, as George blinked away unseen tears, trying his very hardest not to think about how this could be the last time he gets to hold Dream in months.

“I do.” George silently grinned as they bathed in the embrace of the other, just for a moment.

“Then why are you leaving?!” Dream asked with a chuckle that probably bordered on hysterical, “You could stay with me—with *us* —someone else could send your stuff over and- and-”

“I’ve got to go home, Dream.” George mumbled, his splayed hand rubbing soothing circles into Dream’s back. “I want to pack up my own stuff, for one, and say goodbye to everyone, get a visa that will let me stay for more than six months, and besides, what we have is so new! I know we’ve been best friends for years, but all *this* is new, and- and I don’t want to jinx it or anything. Some space will probably be good for us to really think things through, see what we want out of our relationship, right?”

“You’re always right, aren’t you?” Dream grumbled.

“I am!” George proclaimed smugly into the hug.

Dream let out a laboured sigh, one that George could feel. “I love you so much, George.”

“I love you even *more*, Dream,” George chuckled lightly, holding Dream tighter, wishing this moment would last for all eternity, “I always have, and I always will.”

Chapter End Notes

so!

you've reached the end! thank you, first and foremost, for sticking around. whether

you're a silent reader or someone who leaves essays in the comments i appreciate each and every one of you <33

the short answer to why this chapter took so long is: the first term of university

if you do want to get more of an idea as to when i'm going to post future fics, have a little chat with me or just see my dumb thoughts, head over to my twitter

[@L4UNDRYBEAR](#)

thank you so so much to lee ([@putthycat](#) on ao3, [@skeleemon](#) on twitter) for betaing this and also just for being a wonderful person. ily (even if you *are* American), but you know that already :))

thank you also to everyone who has shown love to this fic! there are so many, but the people coming to mind currently are jj, mahirah, ry, star, boredominabucket and aisheep, yall are amazing :D to anyone who's left a comment, kudos, messaged me on twitter about it, left messages on my curiouscat asking when the next chapter will be (don't think i don't see you. because i do. :)) thank you thank you thank you. i literally can't thank you enough for enjoying my silly little gay fanfiction that i have blindly thrown into the void that is the internet.

waltzes and waterfalls is the first full-length multichapter fic that i have written by myself. there are parts of it i love, and parts i will probably go back and rewrite, but i am so happy to be able to say that i am genuinely proud of something that i have completed, as someone who is shit at finishing things. waltzes and waterfalls, it's been a pleasure.

well. that's all from me! be sure to follow my twitter or subscribe to my ao3 profile if you want to see anything i post in the future (dnf Christmas fic with effy is coming very soon!!), and if you were looking for something to read next, I've written a looot of dnf, and also some snf, dn and dnn if any of that would interest you!

thank you one final time,
arti <33

End Notes

well, how was that for a start!

if you liked it so far, be sure to leave a comment, kudos, subscribe etc you know the drill, and maybe come and say hi to me on twitter [@L4UNDRYBEAR](#)

shoutout to kat [@mushbloom](#) for betaing and lee [@putthycat](#) for putting up with my incessant questioning! also thanks to fern [@fernsandroses](#) for suggesting that i set it in Virginia

see you next Thursday!

arti :D

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